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A Journal of Politics and the Arts

VOLUME 240 WASHINGTON, JUNE 3, 2009 NUMBER 4,860

Genocide Step

Back in 2007, then-candidate Barack Obama minced no words when it came to Sudan. "When you see a genocide, whether it's in Rwanda or Bosnia or in Darfur, that's a stain on all of us," he said. "That's a stain on our souls." Obama is now president, and Darfur is still a mess. What is taking place there today is not simple to describe. People are no longer being killed at the alarming rate of 2003 and 2004. Yet the region continues to attract the world's attention because two million people remain housed in camps where they live on the brink of disease and starvation, with little hope of returning home in the near future. In Germany, Cambodia, and Rwanda, genocides came to a halt when *genocidaires* were chased from power. But, in Sudan, while the killing has slowed dramatically, those who perpetrated the massacres remain in control of the country, able to toy with the fate of survivors in the cruelest possible manner. Sudan's leaders continue to impede a fair peace settlement, most recently by obstructing Darfuri political representatives from attending peace talks in Addis Ababa. And, in the wake of the indictment of Sudanese President Omar Bashir by the International Criminal Court, the government expelled numerous international aid groups, making the already precarious existence of displaced Darfuris that much worse. Call this situation what you want—the awful aftermath of an unresolved genocide; the second, less violent phase of a bid by Khartoum to punish ethnic groups that supported the rebellion launched in 2003—but, whatever you label Darfur in 2009, it is still a terrible catastrophe.

PHIL SPENCER/NEWSCOM

Since Obama is a pragmatist—and pragmatism is, by definition, what works—we should judge his policies in this area by a single standard: Are they accomplishing the goal of ending Darfur's suffering? We are sad to say that the initial signs have not been encouraging. In fact, as Obama supporters, we are extraordinarily disappointed.

The challenges are twofold. How to get the aid groups back in? And how to push toward a settlement that allows Darfuris to begin returning home—and insulates them from the whims of Khartoum by granting them physical security and some measure of political autonomy? These are urgent matters. Yet Darfur has not seemed to be a priority for the new administration. Even though the situation has grown more dire with the expulsion of the aid groups, Obama has expended few public words on the subject. Maybe he is working furiously behind the scenes to get the aid groups back into the region, but, if that is the case, then he has failed badly, since Sudan is more or less standing its ground. (In a typically obnoxious move, Khartoum has agreed to let in *other* aid groups, just not the ones that were kicked out in the first place. But, since those kicked out were among the largest and most capable in the world, this is, quite obviously, an unacceptable solution.)

But it is not just the seeming absence of focus on Darfur that troubles us. What little indication we have of the administration's plans has been troubling as well. *The Washington Post* recently quoted a Darfur activist who had met with Obama's Sudan envoy, Scott Gration, three times. The activist described Gration's approach as follows: "He thinks that to keep banging on Khartoum is not the right way. He said he wants to build rapport with Khartoum." If this is truly going to be the administration's strategy, then it is deeply wrongheaded. Sudan's leaders are willing to do whatever it takes to stay in power. For decades, they have not hesitated to slaughter huge numbers of their own people (first in southern Sudan, later in Darfur) in order to preserve their rule. But, operating under the same logic of survival by any means necessary, they have also proved willing to play ball with the West when—as after September 11—they felt that they simply had no choice. Which suggests that, if there is to be relief for the people of Darfur—if the aid groups are to be readmitted and the peace process is to move forward—Khartoum will have to feel pressure from the United States. This means diplomatic pressure, tougher multilateral sanctions, and the credible threat of military force. As the anti-genocide activists at Save Darfur, the Enough Project, and the Genocide Intervention Network recently wrote, "[T]he Sudanese government responds much more directly to pressures than they do to incentives."

Not surprisingly, alarm is growing among many liberals about this administration's approach to Darfur. Everyone from a relative dove like Nicholas Kristof to a relative hawk like (TNR contributor) Eric Reeves has expressed concern over the trajectory of Obama's Sudan policy. Count us among them. We hope that Obama will reverse course on Darfur. Meanwhile, the stain on our souls only grows. ◆

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Deficit Jam

Why is Obama getting creamed in the budget debate?

JONATHAN CHAIT

If there's one political blemish on Barack Obama's first four months in office, it's that he's losing the budget debate. Democrats are openly worrying about the red ink. Republicans have taunted Obama as less fiscally responsible than his predecessor. (House Republican John Campbell compared George W. Bush's deficits to a "couple of drinks," and Obama's to "falling down, throwing up and wasted." The administration's hasty budget-cut announcements (first $100 million, then $17 billion) show signs of panic.

But Obama's budget is actually… pretty responsible. You've probably seen those graphs of the deficit, with gigantic spikes under Obama dwarfing the deficits that came before him. News coverage of Obama and the deficits has relied upon verbs like "cause" or "create"—i.e., "the White House's tax and spending plans would create deficits totaling $2.3 trillion more …" (*The New York Times*), or "Obama's policies would cause government spending to swell …" (*The Washington Post*).

This has left the impression that Obama's policies hold the main responsibility for the deficits. But it's not true. Obama is inheriting a budget facing a structural deficit—that is, one that bleeds red ink even when the economy is running full tilt—and the deficit is exploding because the economy has cratered.

In fact, Obama's budget, on net, *reduces* the deficit. In recent years, Congress and the president have relied on a series of budget gimmicks to mask the size of the deficit. For instance, they would assume that certain tax breaks would expire starting a year in the future, but routinely extend them a year at a time. According to the Congressional Budget Office's numbers, Obama's budget—compared to continuing current policies—would make the deficit $900 billion *lower* over the next decade.

That's why it's unfair to compare Obama's fiscal stewardship unfavorably with his predecessor. Bush inherited a sound budget and made it vastly worse. Obama inherited a terrible budget and proposes to make it somewhat less terrible. Obama and his economic aides obviously feel bad for not doing more to improve things, and their regret has made them appear unduly guilty.

TRB
From Washington

OK, you might say, even if Obama hasn't *created* the deficit mess, then surely he's not doing enough to solve it. The deficit is still huge, whoever's responsible. Maybe so. But there's actually some good reason to believe that the official projections may overstate the size of the deficit.

The theory behind Obama's plan is that the right kinds of reforms in education and health care can produce huge dividends that will, among other things, hold down the deficit. The official projections of the budget, however, essentially ignore the prospect that those reforms will work. This isn't because they're biased. It's because assessing social reforms isn't something a government budget scorer can or should do. Still, just because it's hard to score the budgetary impact of Obama's reforms, it doesn't mean they won't have any effect. So it's worth considering what the budget might look like if Obama's reforms work as intended.

Start with education. Over the last couple of decades, America's educational performance has stagnated, and there has been little attempt to drive national reform. Schools don't prepare enough students for college, and, of those who do qualify academically, many can't afford to attend or graduate. Obama proposes to create data infrastructure to track effective teachers, give states incentives to create performance pay for teachers, and jack up funding for pre-kindergarten education. He also expands Pell Grant funding by $15 billion. It's the most serious national effort to reform and invest in education in four decades.

Will it work? Obviously we can't be sure. There's a lot of empirical evidence that Obama's reforms, based on small-scale state and local experiments, can improve educational outcomes. There's also a lot of evidence that improved educational outcomes can produce significantly higher economic growth. A 2008 paper by Eric Hanushek, Dean T. Jamison, Eliot A. Jamison, and Ludger Woessmann of the conservative Hoover Institution calculated that raising our average math and science test scores by 50 points (which would bring us on par with Canada and Korea, but still well behind countries like Taiwan and Finland) would increase GDP by more than one-third over the next 75 years—a staggering gain. And, while we don't know that Obama's reforms would produce anything like this level of improvement, we do know that even small changes in the economy's growth rate have huge budgetary implications.

Obama's health care plan offers even greater invisible future benefits. You probably know the basic contours of the health care problem. We spend more than twice as much on health care as most advanced countries without getting better results, which means our system is filled with waste. The Commonwealth Fund recently analyzed an Obama-like health plan, which would encourage efficiency through information technology, outcome-based care, and other methods. It found that such a plan would reduce national health care spending by $3 trillion over ten years.

Keep in mind that, because the government is laying out the money to cover the uninsured and implement the cost-saving reforms, the country as a whole could be spending less even if the government is spending more. But the government's expenses would rapidly diminish. Commonwealth's study found that, eleven years out, even the government would be spending less on health care than it otherwise would.

Now, savings of this scale are not going to show up in the official Congressional Budget Office score, because the methods they use are novel. And the private savings won't count at all on the deficit, since they're not on the government's ledger, though every less dollar our employer deducts from our paycheck for health care is one more dollar we can afford to pay in taxes.

We don't know how well Obama's reforms will work. But the official estimates should be understood as a worst-case scenario. In the budget score, a billion in new education spending looks just like a billion in higher Social Security benefits. But to consider both expenditures a kind of "borrowing from the future" or "generational theft" is mindless. Borrowing to invest in reforms with potentially enormous but hard-to-calculate returns is not the same as, say, borrowing to finance a high-income consumption binge, like some recent presidents we could name, who didn't appear to feel any guilt at all about fiscal responsibility. ◆

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Cover illustration by Alex Gross

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THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 240, Number 9, Issue 4,860, June 3, 2009. (Printed in the United States on May 15, 2009.) Published bi-weekly (except for skipped publication dates of April 29 and December 16, 2009) at 1331 H Street, NW, Suite 700, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Lauren Sims at (202) 508-4444. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97; foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, $99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $8.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling).

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Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9383. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Member, BPA Worldwide. Send letters and unsolicited manuscripts to letters@tnr.com. Poetry submissions must be e-mailed to poetry@tnr.com. **For subscription inquiries or problems call (800) 827-1289 or visit our website at www.tnr.com.**

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You deserve a factual look at . . .

A Demilitarized Palestinian State (II)

Should Israel, should the world rely on it?

It is the declared policy of the United States government (and of most of the world) that in order to bring peace to the Middle East, the creation of a Palestinian state – the two-state solution – is indispensable. Even many Israelis have come to agree with that. But it is generally understood and taken for granted that such a state, which would essentially consist of Judea/Samaria (the "West Bank") and Gaza, would have to be totally demilitarized.

What are the facts?

Israel is a very small country. Israel is surrounded by enemies. It is a very small country. Including the Golan and the "West Bank," it is only one-half the size of San Bernardino county in California. Israel concluded peace with Egypt in 1978 and some years later with Jordan. Most other Arab states are still in a declared or undeclared state of war with Israel. Iran, Muslim though not Arab, is the most determined and deadly of them all. It lurks in the back- ground, its foremost military and political objective being the destruction of the State of Israel, which is quite openly declared.

Recent events in Gaza, regrettably, are an indicator of what Israel could expect from an independent Palestinian state, even though declared to be "demilitarized." Hamas, the terror organization in control of Gaza, has lobbed close to 10,000 rockets into Israel. Until now, these rockets have been of relatively poor quality, of fairly short range, and of limited accuracy. Even so, they have caused much damage and injuries and have put the Israeli localities affected into an almost constant state of alarm, making normal life impossible.

Even after the hard lesson that Israel taught Hamas in the recent short war, the terror continues: rockets fall almost daily on the Israeli cities within range. But, supplied by Iran and China, and smuggled through tunnels from the Sinai into Gaza, much more sophisticated rockets are now making their appearance. Larger population centers such as Beersheba and Jerusalem are coming within range.

Demilitarization is a myth. Nobody can reasonably doubt that even if Israel, under the never-ending pressure of world opinion, were to relinquish control of the "West Bank," a scenario similar to what happened and continues to happen in Gaza would prevail. Even if the "West Bank" Palestinians would wish not to become an armed camp similar to Gaza, the reality is that the Arab nations would not allow that. In contrast to Gaza, which is isolated from the world and which can be reached only through tunnels made and used under the "watchful eyes" of the cooperating Egyptians, the "West Bank" is totally accessible. The "Palestinian Authority," which is in control of the "West Bank," has thousands of trained soldiers disguised as police. Those so-called police are poised to be helicoptered in minutes to positions on the border with Israel, with armed forces from Syria reaching them within the same night. But such mobilization of the "demilitarized" Palestine would not even be required. As the Gaza experience shows, the weapons of preference of the Palestinian terrorists are rockets – either the Qassam, which are raining on Israel from Gaza, the Soviet-made Katyushas – highly efficient, truck-mounted and mobile, which are ideal for hit-and-run raids against Israel – or the even more advanced Iranian and Chinese missiles, that are now in the pipeline. Israel could not prevent them from flooding the "West Bank." A look at the map makes clear that even with the missiles of present performance and a hostile and not at all "demilitarized" Palestine covering Israel with missiles from Gaza and from the Judean ridges of the "West Bank," virtually all of Israel would be under the Palestinian guns, from every point of the border, which would by then have lengthened from about 60 miles to over 200 miles. Virtually all of Israel's population centers would be within range. So would virtually all of the country's industrial centers, the military establishments and the country's only international airport. Life in Israel would quite literally grind to a standstill.

> "One can only hope that the Israeli people... and the government of "Bibi" Netanyahu will understand the peril [of a Palestinian state] and will act accordingly."

While the idea of a Palestinian state may have some merit, there is abundant proof – the most recent being the continuing rocket attacks from Gaza – that such a state, whatever the promises at its creation, would represent an immediate existential threat to Israel. There has never been such a Palestinian state and the creation of such a state is not the primary nor even the secondary goal of the Arabs. Their primary and never-changing goal – overshadowing everything else – is the destruction of Israel – "wiping it off the map," to use the fanatic Muslims' favorite phrase. After unwisely having turned Gaza over to the Palestinians, yielding the "West Bank" to its sworn enemies would make Israel indefensible. Israel would be laying the groundwork for its own destruction. Tanks, warplanes, and infantry battalions would only be needed for the final mopping-up process. In the meantime, the missile batteries located in Gaza and on the Judean ridges – Israel's proposed new borders – would suffice to paralyze life and industrial activity in Israel. One can only hope that the Israeli people and Israel's new government under "Bibi" Netanyahu will understand this peril and will act accordingly.

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The Mall

Back Pak

Can we really trust Nawaz Sharif?

Earlier this spring, Nawaz Sharif threatened to topple Pakistani President Asif Ali Zardari's government. Since taking power in September, Zardari had been promising to reinstate Iftikhar Chaudhry, the chief justice of the supreme court, whom Pervez Musharraf had sacked on March 9, 2007. But Zardari, who feared that Chaudhry would try to either curb executive power or dredge up corruption cases, balked repeatedly. This annoyed Sharif—and many of his fellow countrymen—to no end. So, to coincide with the two-year anniversary of Chaudhry's suspension, Sharif planned a "long march" to Islamabad, backed by thousands of lawyers and demonstrators. On March 14, 2009, the eve of his final push toward Islamabad, Sharif described the street protests as a "rare moment of Pakistan's history." Added the two-time former prime minister, "It's [a] prelude to revolution."

Ever since the United States allied with Pakistan after September 11, the thought of Sharif returning to power has filled American leaders with discomfort. He is often described as being chummy with—and sympathetic to—the Islamists, and he firmly opposed the Bush administration's war on terrorism. Which is why it's curious that, at a time when the Pakistani Taliban are exhibiting considerable strength, American officials have begun to court Sharif, believing that he might be able to combat the militants more effectively than Zardari. Apparently, they have convinced themselves that Sharif finally "gets" the threat posed by Muslim extremists. But every aspiring Pakistani leader in the past decade has claimed to get the threat—and it has made little difference.

Sharif's political beginnings were rather ignominious. He rose to power during the 1980s as a protegé of General Zia ul Haq, the military dictator who overthrew and later hanged Benazir Bhutto's father in the late 1970s. Sharif, whose family's influence grew out of its significant industrial holdings, ran an iron foundry until 1983, when he became finance minister, and later chief minister, of Punjab. He was elected prime minister in 1990, and, during his two terms (which were interrupted by Bhutto's second prime ministership), managed to alienate the United States, which had been a cold war ally. In May 1998, he tested a nuclear weapon (ignoring pleas from the Clinton White House). Shortly after that, he tried to impose *sharia* law nationwide, drawing sharp condemnation from women and religious minorities. "We made a nuclear explosion in May," said Sharif, who nearly provoked a war with India a year later. "Now we will make another social explosion with this bill." Sharif was toppled in the October 1999 coup that brought Musharraf to power. A year later, he and his family went into exile in Saudi Arabia. He spent the next seven years shuttling between Saudi Arabia and the United Kingdom, scheming a way to return to office—and his home.

Sharif, a bulbous man who left Pakistan bald and returned with hair plugs, has lately tried to refashion more than just his look; he has tried to sell himself as a liberal democrat. Throughout the spring of 2007, he unambiguously opposed Musharraf and championed Chaudhry's cause more vigorously than any other politician. Both positions earned him the respect of lawyers, university students, and, yes, many Islamists from the mainstream parties such as Jamaat-e-Islami. Faced with

WHITE HOUSE WATCH *With* **DREW FRIEDMAN**

Arlen Specter, the Democratic Party's most junior senator.

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such opposition, Zardari relented and agreed to reinstate Chaudhry on March 16, two days after Sharif warned him that he would face a revolution. He had no other choice. The army had refused to clash with those marching toward the capital, the information minister had already resigned in protest, and Zardari looked weaker than ever.

Sharif's opposition to Zardari is not entirely a function of democratic principle. In the early 1990s, Sharif's father was allegedly manhandled by goons on the orders of a Zardari aide. Later that decade, during Sharif's tenure, Zardari was arrested, imprisoned, and tortured. He holds a policeman named Rana Maqbool, a Sharif crony, personally responsible. When Sharif's brother Shahbaz, also a politician, tried to make Maqbool the top police officer for all of Punjab last year, Zardari intervened and struck down the appointment. And, in terms of politics, Sharif feels that the Pakistan People's Party, formerly led by Bhutto and now by Zardari, has sacrificed its agreements, alliances, and principles again and again in order to gain power.

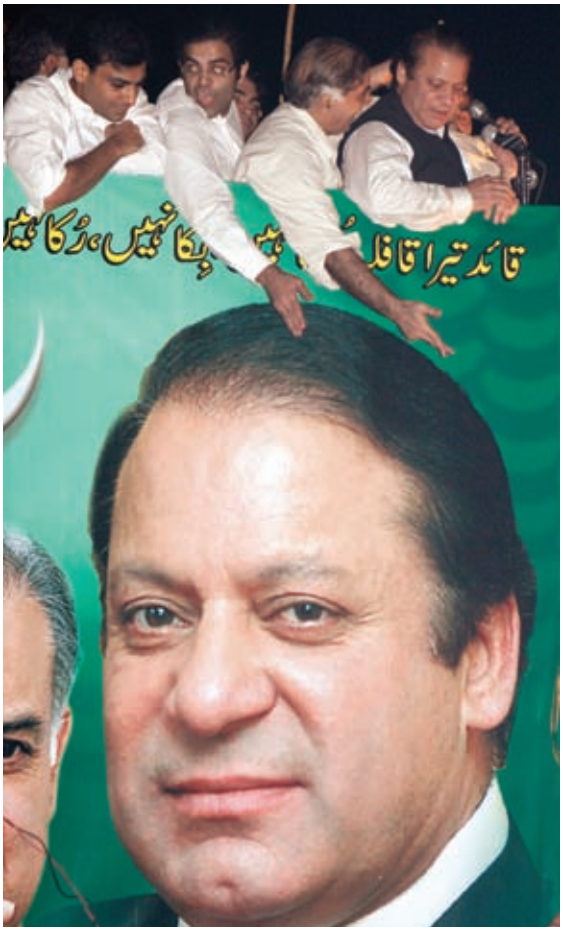
Today, however, it is Sharif's power that is growing. In a survey conducted by the International Republican Institute and released this week, 75 percent of Pakistanis named Sharif as the leader they liked, compared to just 19 percent for Zardari. If elections were held next week, 62 percent said they'd vote for Sharif's party, the Pakistan Muslim League, versus only 17 percent for Zardari's. "After sixteenth of March, the dynamics of Pakistani politics changed very fundamentally. Restoration [of the judges] was a major victory for Mr. Sharif and his party," explains Ahsan Iqbal, a member of the national assembly and the information secretary for Sharif's party. "All the polls show that he is way ahead. He enjoys the same popularity level like Mr. Obama. And Mr. Zardari enjoys the same unpopular levels of what Mr. Bush enjoyed."

Undoubtedly, this is why every senior American visitor to Pakistan lately has called on Sharif. Senator John McCain and Special Envoy Richard Holbrooke have both visited him at his house, where two stuffed lions welcome guests into the foyer. (Sharif's followers call him "the lion of Punjab," even though his party's election logo is a tiger.) In April, Sharif and his brother had lunch at the American Embassy in Islamabad with Holbrooke; Admiral Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and Anne Patterson, the American ambassador to Pakistan.

In a recent e-mail exchange, Sharif explained his new popularity: "We have seen some change of policy to reach out to democratic leadership by the new Obama administration. . . . We discuss the problems very frankly and there is a better understanding that extremism has to be addressed through a multi-pronged strategy than relying just on the security dimension." On the question of whether Zardari can effectively counter the Taliban given his slumping popularity, Sharif wrote, "Without ownership and support of the people we can't win the battle for hearts and minds. . . . Let us not forget, it is also a battle of ideas about future visions for the society."

But is Sharif finally willing to wage such a battle against the Taliban? He's

Nawaz Sharif makes his triumphant return to Lahore in 2007 (left). The Taliban, here at a rally in Mingora, preside over the Swat Valley.



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certainly completed the rite of passage required to get U.S. backing. If you look back over recent years, you can detect a pattern, whereby Pakistani leaders on the cusp of gaining power give interviews to Western news agencies, break from the normally flippant attitude of Pakistan's political establishment, and admit with great candor that the Taliban is a real problem. Doing so conveys to Washington that *this guy (or gal) really grasps the severity of the situation*. Musharraf did this after the September 11 attacks. Bhutto stumped for months before she planned her return in October 2007, repeatedly announcing her willingness to cooperate with Washington against Al Qaeda and the Taliban. In August 2008, as Zardari prepared to take over as president, he admitted to the BBC that the Taliban had "the upper hand." And, last month, Sharif told *USA Today* that the Taliban are "now threatening to get out of Swat and take other areas into their custody. So we've got to avoid that situation."

None of these statements was disingenuous. All these leaders realized the dangers posed by the Taliban and their cohorts. Zardari, of course, was reminded of this painfully by his wife's assassination. And, in fact, on the same day that Bhutto was killed, gunmen first opened fire on a gathering in Rawalpindi that Sharif was attending, killing four of his party workers. In other words, no one has been immune.

That said, Pakistani leaders know that nothing pleases the Americans, or keeps their dollars coming, like a dose of anti-Taliban realism. The Bush administration gave Musharraf more than $10 billion for help in the war on terrorism. And the Obama administration has called for billions more, albeit spread more evenly among economic and civilian institutions than Bush-era funds.

Yet herein lies the fundamental quandary of the U.S.-Pakistan alliance: Any leader that resolves to bomb the Taliban into submission will be discredited domestically as an American stooge. And no Pakistani politician can lead a counterinsurgency against the Taliban without popular support. If the experiences of Musharraf, Bhutto, and Zardari over the past eight years are any indication, Sharif's very willingness to play ball with the Americans could undo the support he's amassed. Perhaps the very fact that we're starting to feel comfortable with him should make us nervous.

NICHOLAS SCHMIDLE

Nicholas Schmidle, a fellow at the New America Foundation, is the author of TO LIVE OR TO PERISH FOREVER: TWO TUMULTUOUS YEARS IN PAKISTAN, *which was released this week.*

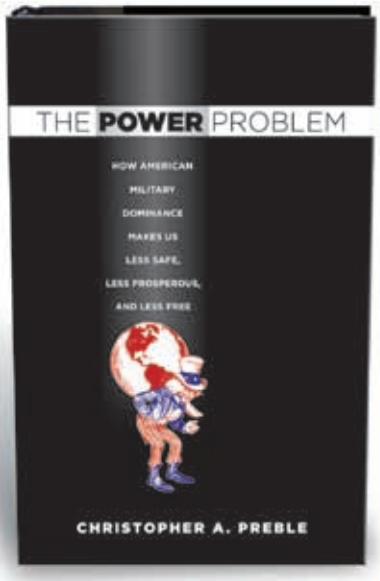
The Newt Bomb

How a pulp-fiction fantasy became a GOP weapons craze.

SPEAKING TO a Washington conference earlier this month, Newt Gingrich heartily recommended a disturbing apocalyptic thriller currently on *The New York Times*' best-seller list. Written by William Forstchen, *One Second After* tells the story of what happens to a college town after the lights go out. Not just the lights, actually, but electrical devices of all kinds. Phones go dead, computers fritz, cars won't start. That this is a more than an inconvenience quickly becomes apparent: Patients die in powerless hospitals, and frozen food begins to rot. Word spreads that airliners have simply dropped from sky, including Air Force One. (The president is dead.) Squirrel meat is traded for ammunition as Mexico reclaims Texas, China occupies the West coast, and cannibalistic mobs rampage everywhere else.

"Preble has a keen appreciation for the limits of military power, for the consequences of its misuse, and for the dangers of militarization. *The Power Problem* is simply terrific."

—ANDREW J. BACEVICH,
author of *The Limits of Power: The End of American Exceptionalism*



Cato Institute scholar Christopher Preble documents the deep risks and liabilities of our overly vast military strength.

HARDBACK: $25
PUBLISHED BY CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS

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As it happens, Forstchen has co-authored several books of historical fiction with Gingrich, the former Republican House speaker. So, when Gingrich spoke to the American Israel Public Affairs Committee's annual policy conference, he was all too happy to plug his friend's book—but also to drive home a policy point. "It's based on fact, it is accurate, and it's horrifying, and we have zero national strategy to respond to it today," Gingrich said. He laid out a vision in which three small nuclear weapons detonated at the right altitude would eliminate all electricity production in the United States. Which is why, he concluded, "I favor taking out Iranian and North Korean missiles on their sites."

Gingrich's doomsday scenario involves something known as an electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack. It is a scientifically valid—if not strategically realistic—theory based on the effect that gamma rays released by exploding nuclear weapons have when they interact with the earth's atmosphere. One or more bombs of the right size, exploded at a high enough altitude, could theoretically fry the circuitry of all electronic equipment lacking special protection—that means everything from iPods to televisions to power plants.

People have fretted about an EMP blast since the cold war. But now, discredited by the Iraq war, Gingrich and a cadre of conservative hawks are resurrecting the chilling vision and applying it to a new world of rogue states and terrorist groups. The attention-grabbing narrative of the pulse threat offers them a fresh argument for some familiar hobbyhorses—namely a multibillion-dollar national missile-defense system and even preemptive military strikes against charter members of the Axis of Evil. Or maybe it's just that Republicans, now consigned to the wilderness, are simply letting their imaginations run wild.

Newt is hardly the first politician to be captivated by a pseudo-realistic potboiler. Bill Clinton grilled his aides about bioterrorism defenses after reading Richard Preston's horrifying account of a genetically engineered virus, *The Cobra Event*. Michael Crichton's paranoid vision of evil climate-change activists, *State of Fear*, won him a meeting with George W. Bush. Forstchen himself has said that *One Second After* was designed to have such an effect. "I wrote the book to convey a warning and bring it before the public eye," Forstchen recently wrote in response to a critic on the liberal blog *ThinkProgress*. His book's success has done more for the issue than years of striving by a hapless band of Washington conservatives.

The godfather of the modern EMP alarmism movement is Republican congressman Roscoe Bartlett of Maryland. "This is just too horrific to be true," Bartlett explains, "so many people want to dismiss it." Bartlett, an 82-year-old retired engineer and Maryland Republican, has worried about an EMP attack since he encountered the concept over a decade ago in—yup—a potboiler novel. "I called my friend Tom Clancy," Bartlett says, to ask about Clancy's reference to the threat in one of his books. Clancy referred Bartlett to a physicist at America's high-tech Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory named Lowell Wood. Wood happened to be in Washington "and so, within an hour, he was in my office," Bartlett explains. Wood, who has warned that an EMP attack could amount to "a giant continental time machine," sending America back to a pre-industrial state, explained that cold war strategists considered a Soviet EMP assault a likely first step in a larger attack on the West. But, since then, he said, the United States had done little to protect its infrastructure against such an event. "This is something that the military had been ignoring!" Bartlett says.

Bartlett set out to change that. In 2001, the Maryland congressman, who is known for a set of quirky passions that include a fixation on "peak oil" theory, which predicts a catastrophic exhaustion of global petroleum supplies, won congressional approval of a commission to study the EMP threat. Some of its members were not exactly mainstream national security experts. Its chairman was William Graham, a former Reagan White House science adviser and enthusiast for the "Star Wars" missile-defense system. Another commission member was Lowell Wood, who, as the *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* has noted, was the Reagan-era champion of a plan to cripple the Soviet nuclear arsenal by means of a giant x-ray laser platform with which he

Jack Black

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reportedly once sought to ignite part of the earth's atmosphere.

Predictably, the EMP commission found that the United States faced a serious threat—not just from the intercontinental missiles of major powers like Russia and China, but also from terrorists and rogue states. The EMP panel went further, concluding that a single Hiroshima-sized bomb could realistically shut down America's critical infrastructure. But the panel's report didn't exactly rock Washington. "The report unfortunately was released on the same day that the 9/11 Commission released their report," sighs Clay Wilson, a believer and former analyst with the Congressional Research Service, "so all the news people were down the hall." Awakening the public would have to wait for another day.

The EMP commission actually had a point. There is a scientific basis for fears about widespread electric outages, and there is evidence that other countries, possibly including Iran, have studied the technique. "EMP is real," agrees Joe Cirincione, a nuclear weapons expert who now runs a pro-disarmament think tank, the Ploughshares Fund. But, as Cirincione notes, few analysts take the threat very seriously. The odds that Iran or North Korea would prefer a technologically untested Rube Goldberg scheme to merely nuking us seem slim. And any terrorist group able to execute such a plan was probably capable enough to get us one way or another anyhow.

Those realities argue overwhelmingly for prudent but unsexy infrastructure protections, not preemptive attacks or advanced technology. "It's horror theater," says Cirincione, "trying to scare Americans into doing something which a rational analysis would stop them from doing." Charles Ferguson, a nuclear engineer at the Council on Foreign Relations, agrees. "[T]here are some important things we can be doing that won't cost much, but that can serve as a vital backup," he says. For instance, Ferguson has advised the New York City Fire Department to keep some backup communications equipment and extra ignition switches for its trucks in electromagnetic pulse–resistant steel cages.

The hawkish right, however, has much bigger things in mind. Although Bartlett himself seems to lack a sub-rosa strategic agenda, he has found common cause among national-security conservatives, about whom the same can't be said. Take, for instance, the spin of Frank Gaffney, perhaps the right's main missile-defense zealot: "[T]he United States must now make a redoubled effort to deploy effective, comprehensive defenses against ballistic missiles that might be used for EMP and other attacks," Gaffney wrote in a 2006 *National Review* article. Republican Senator Jon Kyl, a key missile-defense champion on Capitol Hill, has held hearings and published a *Washington Post* op-ed on the EMP threat. The like-minded *Wall Street Journal* opinion pages have repeatedly flogged the EMP commission's findings. "The only solution to this [EMP] problem," Brian T. Kennedy of the Claremont Institute wrote in an op-ed in the pages last November, "is a robust, multilayered missile-defense system."

President Obama, however, is far less open to such suggestions than his predecessor, leading some on the right to desperate measures, like reviving the EMP anxiety. More broadly, archconservatives like Gingrich and Dick Cheney have gotten used to invoking low-probability worst-case scenarios to justify their views on everything from preemptive military action to torture. So why not resort to outright science fiction?

For Roscoe Bartlett, who probably never expected to be at the center of a movement-conservative cause, the far right's embrace of his pet issue doesn't seem to have been very helpful. "People just don't like to talk about it," he says. "It's like the crazy aunt in the attic." How could anyone get that impression?

Michael Crowley

Numbers Racket

The bean counters who could kill health care reform.

Everywhere you look, health care reform seems to be chugging along. Insurers and drug companies are visiting the White House to show solidarity with President Obama. House Democrats are promising to pass a bill by July 31. But, if you talk to senior staff in the administration or on Capitol Hill, you'll detect anxiety over one tiny agency—an agency that helped kill health care reform in 1994 and has the power to do so again.

That agency is the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), which is just now weighing in on the debate. When Congress writes a bill, the CBO is the agency that determines how much implementing it will likely cost. And that's no small matter. For every extra dollar in new expenditures that the CBO projects, Congress must find a new dollar in revenue—or learn to live with a new dollar in deficits. Back in 1994, the CBO decided that paying for universal health insurance under the Clinton plan would cost more than the administration thought it would. That forced Bill Clinton and his allies to propose additional regulations on insurance prices, incurring a political liability that helped seal the plan's fate.

The CBO hasn't rendered an official verdict on health care reform this time around, because, officially, there's still no plan on which to render a final verdict. But the CBO began producing preliminary projections about three weeks ago, based on rough proposals that congressional staff have submitted. And, according to several sources familiar with the estimates, the news isn't quite what Obama and his allies were hoping to hear.

The good news for reformers is the CBO's determination that expanding health-insurance coverage would cost a lot less than many outside experts had predicted. Instead of a politically daunting $1.5 trillion, the CBO figures the price tag will be closer to $1 trillion, at least under certain parameters. But the reason for the lower estimate is a bit unsettling. Even with a requirement that everybody obtain insurance—a so-called individual mandate—the CBO assumes a significant number of the uninsured won't get coverage. That would leave the country short of universal coverage, the goal Obama and his allies have repeatedly cited.

Other preliminary judgments from the CBO are causing more consternation. To help defray the cost of expanding coverage—and to help make medical care more affordable generally—reformers have proposed creating electronic medical records, studying which treatments work best, and taking other steps that would make the business of health care more efficient while cutting down on unnecessary medical treatments. The CBO is less optimistic these moves will save money. What's more, the CBO may determine that, for accounting purposes, the money individuals spend on health insurance—or, at least, some portion of it—should count as part of the public revenue stream. That would give critics more grounds for labeling the Democrats' plan a costly expansion of government.

If that judgment sounds familiar, that's because it is. The CBO took nearly the same positions back in 1994—a fact not lost on either the White House or congressional leaders, who have communicated their concerns publicly and privately. One apparent purpose of bringing industry

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leaders to meet Obama this week was to showcase the potential for cutting costs; see, the administration seemed to be signaling, even the health care industry thinks it can save money by becoming more efficient. But it will take more than such appearances to move the CBO.

As it happens, one reason so many observers (this writer included) have been optimistic about reform's prospects this year has been a belief that the CBO wouldn't play the same curmudgeonly role it did during the Clinton-care fight. In 2007 and 2008, the agency came under the direction of Peter Orszag, who famously made health care reform a personal and institutional obsession. Convinced that exploding health care costs were going to cripple the government and eventually the country, he used his perch to sound the alarm—and used his agency to grease the wheels of change. He nearly doubled the number of experts studying health care and, convinced that their reading of the academic literature left them with an unnecessarily narrow and dated perspective, pushed them to explore what was happening out in the real world.

Like all bureaucracies, though, the CBO has its own inertia—and its own set of institutional concerns. Asked to do the impossible, thankless task of predicting the future based on ambiguous, incomplete evidence, the CBO finds itself under constant attack from critics—left and right, up and down in the Washington power hierarchy. Until recently, the CBO's big worry was conservative supply-siders, who kept insisting the agency use something called "dynamic scoring" to prove that tax cuts could help pay for themselves. Going out on a limb is hazardous in this environment. The best posture is a claim of scientific integrity, backed by a strict reading of peer-reviewed academic literature. So, when Orszag nudged them to change, sometimes the careerists nudged back.

Under Orszag's successor, Doug Elmendorf, the CBO has continued and even intensified some of the study habits Orszag instilled, while working furiously to keep pace with the packed congressional agenda. But the agency still seems inclined to produce estimates that strike many outsiders as overly cautious. To take one example, electronic medical records make it a lot easier to compile data on which treatments work, which—in turn—will let you cut down on the use of ineffective ones. In other words, there is reason to believe the two innovations would save more money in combination than they might separately. But, according to people familiar with the CBO's thinking, the agency seems skittish about giving extra credit for the way the two reforms would interact. Harvard economist David Cutler, a key architect of Obama's campaign plan, just published a paper outlining the potential to save the federal government $600 billion over ten years—about half of what it would cost to pay for expanding insurance coverage. Again, the CBO seems skeptical.

Nobody disputes that there is room for honest intellectual agreement; plenty of smart people dispute claims about savings that reform will generate, but it's an open question whether the CBO takes skepticism too far—and whether such a super-strict reading of the evidence really serves the public interest. As Obama himself frequently points out, exploding health care expenses are going to cripple the government and, eventually, the country. If the CBO's estimates or the decision to classify premium payments as government revenue end up paralyzing lawmakers, effectively snuffing out reform again, it's quite likely that the country's fiscal situation will be worse—not better—ten or 20 years hence.

Of course, lawmakers wouldn't need such favorable scoring if their proposals were a little bolder. If Obama and Congress could get more aggressive about steering reimbursements away from doctors and hospitals that provide poor care, the CBO would undoubtedly credit those moves as generating additional savings. And, if reformers were willing to find more tax revenue—by, say, declaring that premiums for the most generous health plans were no longer fully exempt from personal income taxes—they could raise the money they need. But those are tough political tasks. Providers of medical care don't like their incomes going down; taxpayers don't like their liabilities going up. In the end, Obama and Congress will have to live within certain constraints that the CBO sets—adjusting their proposals to coincide with the agency's predisposition or scaling back what they hope to do. The result might be an imperfect law, but, as the Clinton-care veterans will tell you, sometimes that's better than no law at all.

Jonathan Cohn

Test Anxiety

What the banks still won't tell us.

A few days after the stress-test results hit Wall Street last week, Fed chairman Ben Bernanke took to a podium in Jekyll Island, Georgia, to share his thoughts on the much-hyped exercise. The chairman went deep into the weeds on how 150 government examiners spent ten weeks scrubbing the balance sheets of the country's largest banks. He pronounced the findings firmly in the mainstream of independent studies, with copious citations to bolster his case. Then, when he was done, Bernanke tried to place the stress tests in a broader context. "A principal goal of the capital assessment process is to help increase confidence in the banking system. . . . Whether the objectives of the assessment program were achieved will only be known over time," he said. "We hope that, in two or three years, we will be able to reflect on the banking system's return to health."

✳ *For more on the battle to fix our economy, check out Noam Scheiber's new blog,* ***THE STASH*** *at www.tnr.com*

Bernanke is exactly right: The stress tests are a key inflection point in the story of the financial crisis. If, in two or three years, the banks have fully recovered, we'll look back on the stress tests as the moment Bernanke and his colleagues righted the course. But if, in three years, the banks are still muddling along—or, worse, if they've badly regressed—we may wonder whether the government missed an opportunity to wake the banks from a deep denial about losses.

To the extent a banker can feel relief in the middle of a financial crisis, that's the emotion that reigned on Wall Street in the aftermath of the stress tests. The government found that the country's 19 largest banks together needed a mere $75 billion in capital to cushion themselves against a near-doomsday scenario—a combination of shrinking GDP, high unemployment, and slumping housing prices the government deemed only ten to 15 percent likely. If necessary, the banks could procure much of that $75 billion simply by converting the preferred shares they awarded the government (similar to a loan in that a company has to pay a periodic interest rate to holders of the shares) into common stock (that is, an ownership stake). But, in most cases, even this won't be necessary. Thanks to a rising stock market, even the most stressed-out banks have had little trouble raising money from private investors—something that seemed im-

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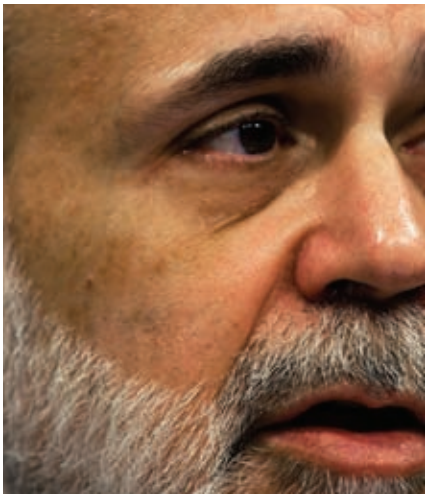
possible only weeks ago. The day after the government told Wells Fargo it had to raise $13.7 billion, it turned around and raised $8.6 billion in a new stock offering. (Some of The New Republic's investors may have positions in certain banks.)

The concern is that, while the government's numbers are defensible, there are simply hundreds of ways the stress tests could be off the mark. One easy-to-see example is the subset of securities—like mortgage-backed securities—the banks acquired for investment purposes and plan to hold for years. The 19 major banks have portfolios of such securities collectively worth hundreds of billions of dollars—many of which are now trading at deep discounts—and yet the stress test only anticipated about $35 billion worth of losses in this category. It's not hard to imagine the losses being much higher—if, for example, the mortgages backing certain securities go into default.

Actually, you don't need to imagine. MetLife, an insurer that officially became a bank holding company in 2001, has a portfolio of debt securities it values at about $188 billion. By its own accounting, if MetLife were to try to sell those securities today, it would have to sell them at a loss of about $29 billion. But, because MetLife deems the securities only temporarily depressed, and because it plans to keep them far into the future, MetLife doesn't "realize" the losses. Or, as MetLife's 2008 annual report elegantly put it, "[Based on] the Company's current intent and ability to hold [the securities] … for a period of time sufficient for them to recover, the Company has concluded that these securities are not other-than-temporarily impaired."

As it happens, there's another insurance company that's heavily invested in debt securities hit hard by last fall's financial meltdown: AIG. And, unlike MetLife, the accountants at AIG's life insurance division looked over its $263 billion portfolio and concluded that some $39 billion was a lost cause. In fact, the language AIG uses to discuss the same issues in its annual report is strikingly at odds with MetLife's: "Notwithstanding AIG's intent and ability to hold such securities until they have recovered … AIG concluded that it could not reasonably assert that the impairment would be temporary."

To be fair, the government was far more conservative than MetLife in its stress-test accounting: It estimated in the neighborhood of $8 billion in losses for these securities. Likewise, it's entirely possible that the particular contents of MetLife's portfolio differ significantly from AIG's—the government had access to "granular" information you and I do not. The point isn't to bash MetLife or the government's auditors. Just to point out that a stress test of this scope is incredibly subjective and each judgment call can have enormous consequences.



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Bernanke is right, though: Even with these judgment calls, the government's numbers are broadly consistent with credible independent reports. Overall, the government estimated that the 19 major banks would suffer roughly $600 billion in cumulative losses under its stress-test scenario this year and next with earnings of about $363 billion. The IMF predicts that the entire U.S. banking system will suffer about $550 billion in cumulative losses while earning $300 billion. (This translates loosely to $367 billion and $200 billion for the stress-tested banks, which account for about two-thirds of the banking system.) Yes, the government insists its estimate is far more pessimistic than what is likely to occur, while the IMF touts its forecast as a reasonable expectation of the future. But, once you dispense with the no-longer-plausible idea that the stress tests posit a truly remote scenario, the two sets of numbers match up pretty well. (Most economic forecasts now fall somewhere between the governments' expected "baseline" scenario and the stress-test scenario.)

The problem isn't that the government won't acknowledge the size of banks' losses—the stress tests more or less do that. The real problem is that the banks won't fully acknowledge their losses. One of the more elusive concepts in all of accounting is an exercise known as reserving. When a bank receives, say, interest payments on a loan, not all of that revenue is profit. Some of it must be set aside to cover the possibility that the loan could go bad—what's known as a loss reserve. The relevant accounting rule says banks must set aside reserves for any "probable" losses over the intermediate-term (usually a year). Though there is some debate among accountants over what probable means—some say a better-than-even-chance, others say 70 to 80 percent likely—it is hard to conclude that the banks are adequately reserved.

One way the Fed tracks this is by looking at the ratio of reserves to actual losses. Because reserves are forward-looking (losses you anticipate over the next year) and actual losses are backward-looking (losses you've already suffered), it's not hard to see why this ratio should have risen after last fall's financial crisis: The crisis meant there would be big future losses, as people increasingly defaulted on their loans (hence the need for heavy reserves), but not necessarily a lot of losses initially (since many of those defaults hadn't happened just yet). In fact, the ratio of reserves to losses has been basically flat or falling for the four biggest banks over the last several quarters. (The four banks declined to comment. Their public filings say they believe they're reserving adequately, while conceding that the exercise is subjective.)

A more direct way to see this is to inspect the losses the banks implicitly expect. In their annual filings, banks are required to attach a "fair value" to their loan portfolio (essentially a market price), which is different from the value the banks claim on their books. As Christian Leuz, an accounting professor at the University of Chicago, notes, subtracting this "fair value" from the "book value" gives a rough estimate for the losses a bank would suffer if it had to liquidate its portfolio immediately—which comes to about $196 billion for the country's four largest banks (assuming my math is right). This should be a very pessimistic number, since a bank can always make more money by hanging on to some of its loans, which banks often do. But, pessimistic as it is, it's far, far smaller than the government's estimate for these banks' loan losses under its stress-test scenario—about $345 billion.

Bank self-delusion about losses is an old story—and a potentially alarming one. In 1991, the General Accounting Office (GAO) conducted a kind of autopsy on 39 banks that had failed in the late '80s. One of the figures the GAO studied was the difference between the loss reserves the banks had set aside six months before failing and the loss reserves regulators deemed necessary once they had a chance to inspect their books

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upon failure. The difference was staggering: $2.1 billion versus $9.4 billion—an increase of roughly four-and-a-half times. The banks' blissful (or perhaps willful) obliviousness to potential losses had stuck taxpayers with an enormous tab. "Banks do not crash overnight and there should have been some warning of the huge losses that had to be taken and, for the most part, absorbed by [the government]," the report groused.

Fortunately, thanks to the stress tests, the banks are being forced to raise capital to absorb potential losses whether or not they acknowledge them. But, even so, one can't feel too comfortable with a situation in which banks systematically lowball the numbers that determine whether they survive or collapse. For all its heroic digging, after all, the government only had 150 examiners spread out across 19 massive banks for ten weeks. The banks, by contrast, collectively have thousands of accountants and auditors at their disposal. There's no way the government could completely overcome this information disadvantage, even if it had had double the number of people spending double the amount of time. At a certain point, we have to rely on the banks own assessment of their financial situation. And that's when things get a little scary.

In April, Neil Barofsky, the special inspector general for the government's bank bailout, said his office was looking into whether certain banks committed fraud last fall to demonstrate that they were fundamentally sound—a precondition for receiving bailout money. "I hope we don't find a single bank that's cooked their books to try to get money but I don't think that's going to be the case," Barofsky told the *Financial Times*. Raise your hand if you disagree.

Noam Scheiber

Mend Times

Starting over in Rwanda.

Raj Rajendran has great expectations for Rwanda, a nation whose devastation would seem to invite pity and charity, not entrepreneurial exuberance. His thriving textile operation, Utexrwa, accounts for a sizeable chunk of the country's manufacturing sector. With his kindly monomania about the goodness of textile production and copious public spirit, he seems like a businessman from another age, maybe a character out of Dickens. He recently made time to meet me at his factory in Kigali's outskirts, on a Saturday morning. He was about to fly off to Switzerland to talk to a World Bank group, and the story of success he told me at breakneck speed made it clear why the World Bank would be interested in him.

Rajendran came to Kigali from India, where he had run textile factories for 25 years. In 1999, Utexrwa's owners contacted him to ask if he would take on the job of getting their company going again. The *interahamwe*—the militia that served as the genocide's shock troops—had looted the plant and killed almost one-third of its workers.

In a short time, Rajendran had restored the factory to full capacity, eventually taking it over himself. Then he had an epiphany: Rwanda's climate was perfect for growing mulberry trees and raising the silkworms that feed on them. At an official reception in 2000, he met Rwanda's leader, Paul Kagame, and his overflowing eagerness to be photographed with the president made the normally solemn Kagame laugh—an event so extraordinary that everyone took notice of him. Kagame liked the silk idea and encouraged Rajendran to import trees from India and plant them on government land. And, eureka! The mulberry trees thrived, the silkworms adored their leaves, Rajendran bought up an Indian silk mill to get the machinery to spin it, and Rwanda was in business. With the delighted self-regard of the happily obsessed, he told me that he intends to make Rwanda the world's leading producer of high-quality silk.

Raj Rajendran represents the future in a country that, 15 years ago, looked like it might not have one. In July 1994, at the moment the rebel Rwandan Patriotic Front (RPF) commanded by Kagame ended the genocide and took power, the best bet was that the country was headed for years of meltdown: cycles of ethnic terror on the order of Sierra Leone and Liberia. Nearly one million people were dead; thousands of bereft orphans were wandering around homeless. The RPF itself had blood on its hands, its soldiers responsible for thousands of deaths on their march south. An HIV/AIDS epidemic was simmering, brought on by the rapes that we now know were a tool of the *genocidaires*. The *interahamwe* had fled across the border to Congo (then Zaire), along with sympathizers and family members, a collection of nearly 1.5 million refugees who immediately became a humanitarian crisis. With the unwitting help of international agencies that lavished aid on the Zaire camps, the killers regrouped as a military force. They made incursions into Rwanda to remind their fellow citizens they were just across the border, waiting to "finish the job," as the sinister saying was whispered. Two terrible wars in what's now Congo—in 1996–97 and 1998–2003—resulted from Rwanda's determination to root out the *genocidaires* and their allies.

Rwanda, in short, faced daunting odds. But, today, although the violence next door in Congo continues, the country is at peace inside its borders. Some 30,000 soldiers have demobilized and come home from Congo. Rwanda is a darling of development agencies: Kagame believes it can be the financial, transportation, and communications center of a vitalized central Africa. It seemed to me the place had lost the air of a haunted house in the two years since I visited. Gleaming banks and office buildings crowd central Kigali. NGOs proliferate, with their droves of idealistic young Westerners working on health, education, and social service projects. Flocks of American missionaries alight to build churches and evangelize. Indeed, hundreds of snappily dressed Rwandans packed the cavernous new Pentecostal church I attended on Palm Sunday, a modern-minded branch that encourages worldly success rather than self-abnegation. There is now a study-abroad program for American undergraduates in Kigali, a sure sign that the city is, indeed, as its boosters claim, one of the safest in Africa.

And yet, beneath all these outward signs of success lies a difficult, maybe intractable, predicament. The problem is reconciliation. No post-catastrophic society has faced the unimaginable task of creating a polity where large numbers of victims, killers, and all those in between must live together, side by side. In postwar Europe, Jewish survivors emigrated en masse to Israel and the United States. In Cambodia, survivors of the Khmer Rouge went back to their villages, where they lived with killers—but, unlike in Rwanda, survivors were the overwhelming majority, and the political cadre who had terrorized them was a minority. Even in the former Yugoslavia, a territorial division today mostly separates Bosnians from Serbs. The moral and psychological complications that face Rwandans are massive and mind-boggling. Kagame is a pragmatist, and pragmatics are a balm to

ANTHONY RUSSO

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deep wounds. But, underneath the bustle and the schemes, the new buildings and the paved roads, lies the invisible rubble of psyches.

"You see what we deal with," remarked the tall, elegant man standing beside me at the Red Cross tent in Nyanza, outside Kigali. It was the morning's mass commemoration of the fifteenth anniversary of the genocide, which began on April 7, 1994: Nyanza was the site of a gruesome massacre of 5,000 men, women, and children during the first week of killing. We were the only bystanders at a triage center tucked away at the back of the crowd, watching as medical workers struggled to soothe people who had fallen apart during the ceremony. The man was a high government official, there instead of the dignitaries' stand, he explained, because he thought his presence might help. "So many people in such bad shape," he murmured. The close-packed crowd parted for a pair of volunteers carrying a victim, flailing and keening. "It's a real problem," he concluded gravely.

The government's program of reconciliation has taken a number of forms: Thousands of *gacaca* courts (community-based bodies created to deal with the huge corpus of genocide crimes) involving millions of people have deliberated questions of justice and meted out sentences; a repatriation program of soldiers from Congo provides generous resettlement grants and jobs in the military for some; convicted *genocidaires* can reduce their prison time through community service projects, some of which build houses for orphans and survivors. But at the center of these efforts has been an attempt to redefine the identities of Rwanda's citizens—to essentially create a non-ethnic nation. The government prohibits the use of ethnic labels, in an attempt to curtail "divisionism" linguistically. The ban is powerful: While unenforceable outside public discourse, uneasiness with the words "Hutu" and "Tutsi" creeps into private conversation as well. During the weeklong commemoration in April, the mandate was clear and heavy-handed: Everyone remember, and remember in the same way. For a week, the country came to a halt. There were no weddings or issues of government documents; schools closed; everyone had to attend meetings in their neighborhoods or villages—and if they didn't, police redirected them.

The project of redefining the way Rwandans conceive their own identities is an ambitious one to say the least. The hope is that the next generation will be weaned from the labels. And Hutu and Tutsi really were such flimsy, arbitrary ethnic constructs that it should be possible, at least in theory, for them to wither away. The problem is that the genocide conferred indelible meaning on them: The line between Hutu and Tutsi was the line between perpetrator and victim. Underneath the official mechanisms of remembering, there is a constant, low-level battle between the two camps. "We are all Rwandans now!" pleaded the Tutsi accuser at the *gacaca* session I attended, imploring the prevaricating witnesses to his brothers' deaths to tell the truth about what they saw. But they were obdurate and uncooperative. An American who taught English in Rwanda told me how he stumbled into a minefield when, in order to get students conversing in English, he introduced what he thought was an anodyne subject: dogs. The discussion exploded, furious students who had seen dogs eating corpses in 1994 facing off against enraged students who thought bygones should be bygones and the calumnies against dogs should cease. No one said who was Tutsi and who was Hutu, but the positions were clear.

Meanwhile, along with Kagame's insistence on national unity has come a heavy-handed governing style that critics denounce as authoritarian. They make this case mostly from outside the country, because there are no outlets for strong dissent inside Rwanda. Kagame and the RPF, they argue, are power-hungry

The Kigali Memorial Centre in Rwanda commemorates the 1994 genocide.

XINHUA/LANDOV

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opportunists who exploited Western guilt to seize the moral high ground and rebrand themselves as Rwanda's saviors. From their viewpoint, the creation of a non-ethnic national identity is little more than a sham to pretty up Tutsi rule over a cowed Hutu population—a political arrangement going back centuries to the Tutsi kings. They believe that Rwanda is headed for disaster because Hutu resentments are bound to explode. "Nothing! Nothing is better in the country!" I heard a distinguished researcher declaim at an event in the United States last year. A young American in Kigali told me that Rwandan friends speak of chronic fear of falling afoul of Kagame's security forces. "When people get to know you, they tell you they don't really feel safe at all," she said. And it is true that the police and security forces make the LAPD look like English bobbies. When I left a commemoration event late in the evening, the president had not yet spoken, and the gendarmes at the exits were reluctant to let people go home. I got a shove from a scowling soldier that would have earned him a civil suit in the United States. Such menaces small and large are the stuff of daily life for ordinary Rwandans.

Yet the one counter-fact that even diehard antagonists stumble over in their indictment is that Kagame has made good on a commitment to bring security and stability to Rwanda. Peace inside the country has held since the end of the second Congo war, despite the influx of demobilized *genocidaires* from Congo and the release of tens of thousands of prisoners. The country is a long way from liberal democracy. But the virtues of the status quo lie elsewhere. Kagame, a man educated in the hard school of war, is a different leader than he was in 1994. He has gambled big on what peace can mean. I thought about this as I listened to a lovely psychiatric nurse at an HIV clinic for women describe how she treats patients who come to her with post-traumatic stress disorder: "I take their hands to establish contact. . . . I explain that no one is hunting them now, that they aren't going to die, that no one is going to kill them." *No one is going to kill them*: That simple fact, on which this clinician and her patients depend, is, 15 years later, Kagame's towering, inarguable achievement. It is not the same thing as reconciliation—perhaps in the end reconciliation is a chimera—but it is what Rwandans have for now.

CHRISTINE STANSELL

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The Forgotten Masterpieces of Henry Fairlie

WASHINGTON NEVER KNEW what to make of Henry Fairlie. When he arrived in this city in the 1960s, he was already famous in his native England for having coined the term "the Establishment" during a meteoric rise on Fleet Street. Here was a staunch Tory who ridiculed Republicans, a leading journalist who relished pointing out the sins of journalists (particularly the ones who employed him), and a foreigner who praised America as rapturously as any native son.

All of these qualities, which are really different expressions of a lively independent streak, would make Fairlie a vital and beloved contributor to THE NEW REPUBLIC. *Between the late 1970s and his death in 1990, Fairlie wrote dozens of essays about politics, culture, journalism, and American life for the magazine. He could be absolutely devastating (see his definitive critiques of George F. Will and* VANITY FAIR*). A review of one of William F. Buckley's collections was so harsh that Buckley took out a full-page ad in the magazine to reprint an old fusillade he'd written against Fairlie. Yet he had a genuine literary touch as well, and enough life experience to make every piece vivid. When Marty Peretz and then–managing editor Michael Kinsley instituted the back-page Diarist in 1977, they made Fairlie its original and sole author.*

For all that he contributed to the magazine's pages and its office life—his rebukes at weekly editorial meetings could be as fierce as his support for young writers was generous—Fairlie never joined the staff: He had been, and wanted to remain, a freelancer. But independence takes a toll. When Fairlie was turned out of his Washington apartment, his TNR office became his home. "I bet you don't know anyone who lives in such a high-rent district as I do," he would joke with friends.

This summer, Yale University Press and New Republic Books publishes BITE THE HAND THAT FEEDS YOU: ESSAYS AND PROVOCATIONS *by Henry Fairlie, a revival of his timely arguments (both here and elsewhere) and his inimitable voice. His friends at this magazine know better than most what a brilliant and improbable figure he was—or, as they wrote when he died, "one of the last tribunes of a tougher, richer, grander time."*

—Jeremy McCarter

"Why I Love America"

I HAD BEEN in the country about eight years, and was living in Houston, when a Texas friend asked me one evening: "Why do you like living in America? I don't mean why you find it interesting—why you want to write about it—but why you like living here so much." After only a moment's reflection, I replied, "It's the first time I've felt free."

One spring day, shortly after my arrival in America, I was walking down the long, broad street of a suburb, with its sweeping front lawns (all that space), its tall trees (all that sky), and its clumps of azaleas (all that color). The only other person on the street was a small boy on a tricycle. As I passed him, he said, "Hi!"—just like that. No four-year-old boy had ever addressed me without an introduction before. Yet here was this one, with his cheerful "Hi!" Recovering from the culture shock, I tried to look down stonily at his flaxen head, but instead, involuntarily, I found myself saying in return: "Well—hi!" He pedaled off, apparently satisfied. He had begun my Americanization.

"Hi!" As I often say—for Americans do not realize it—the word is a democracy. (I come from a country where one can tell someone's class by how they say "Hallo!" or "Hello!" or "Hullo," or whether they say it at all.) But anyone can say "Hi!" Anyone does. Shortly after my encounter with the boy, I called on the then Suffragan Bishop of Washington. Did he greet me as the Archbishop of Canterbury would have done? No. He said, "Hi, Henry!" I put it down to an aberration, an excess of Episcopalian latitudinarianism. But what about my first meeting with Lyndon B. Johnson, the President of the United States, the Emperor of the Free World, before whom, like a Burgher of Calais, a halter round

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my neck, I would have sunk to my knees, pleading for a loan for my country? He held out the largest hand in Christendom, and said, "Hi, Henry!"

—July 4, 1983

"Tory Days"

[George] Will begins with a mildly amusing quotation from Stephen Leacock about the writer's craft: "Just get paper and pencil, sit down, and write as it occurs to you. The writing is easy—it's the occurring that's hard." But not for Will. "Actually," he at once says, "the 'occurring' is not hard for someone blessed with a Tory temperament."

The writer glides like a skater, and the reader can too easily glide with him. Will in his bow tie is an elegant Victorian skater on the pond, and the maiden on his arm feels blessed. "Ah!" she sighs, "a Tory temperament—you do like to sound old-fashioned, Mr. Will." Mr. Will pats her muff and skates on: " … and sentenced to live in this stimulating era." The maiden begins to flutter, "Oh, to be sentenced… ," but realizes too late that they have been skating on not even thin ice, and she goes under, as the reader will many times, with no hand held out to rescue her.

—November 10, 1986

"Merry FAXmas"

If TNR were to choose a Man or Woman of the Year for its cover, my nomination for 1988 would be the five nuns of the Discalced Carmelites of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary of Mount Carmel in Morris Township, New Jersey, who this fall barricaded themselves in their monastery in protest against the introduction of modern comforts to their cloistered life. The worldly distractions against which they revolted, all introduced by Mother Teresa Hewitt since she took over the monastery a year ago, include "television, newspapers, radio, snacks, and a high-tech lighting system in the chapel," according to the Catholic journal *Crisis*. These nuns are the sanest people of whom I have read all year, joyful models for us in this season of universal gorging and gouging. They are simply saying that they do not wish to clutter their lives. I never stroll through a shopping mall without observing that the display of goods includes almost none of the necessities of life. Shoes, we may think, are necessary; but then, of course, the *Discalced* Carmelites go unshod. The gross national product in America now feeds a gross national appetite for the conspicuous consumption of vanities. The "curse of plenty" against which Churchill warned is now a disease and daily distraction. The nuns are speaking to us. Perhaps it is the society as a whole that needs to take a vow of poverty.

—January 2, 1989

"Press Against Politics"

If one really feared democracy, if one really feared the people, one would not waste time discrediting a Democrat as against a Republican, a liberal as against a conservative; one would simply discredit them all, candidates and voters. One would impute base motives to the politicians, and mundane motives to the people. One would teach them to despise themselves; one would instruct them to have contempt for the political process; one would make something—anything—look superior to the political motive: art, movies, sports, pornography, nature. It does not matter what the distraction, as long as it distracts; and always the purpose is the same, to leave the economic realm in command over all others, to explain all human impulse, as it is expressed in the political process, in terms of nothing more than the "acquisitive instinct." …

The moral information which has been lacking in the coverage of this year's election is the conviction that the political world is inherently good. It is as if every journalist is afraid that he might be caught in believing in something or in somebody.

—November 13, 1976

"Citizen Kennedy"

On January 20 it will have been a quarter of a century since the young president stood bareheaded in the cold, and gave an inaugural address of such brilliance and power that Sam Rayburn pronounced it "better than anything Franklin Roosevelt said at his best—it was better than Lincoln." Four of the presidents since then have given six inaugural addresses. We can remember not a word from any of them, nothing of the bearing of the men or the atmosphere of the ceremony. The inaugural address of John F. Kennedy can be quoted by those who were not even born at the time.

"And so, my fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country." There is no one who thinks that those words were said by Richard Nixon or Ronald Reagan, and all efforts to play on them have always failed. Despite their familiarity, they are not shopworn. They were—they still are—the key words of the inaugural. You could put aside everything else about standing on the walls of freedom round the world, and you would still be left with that remarkable summons to the citizens of the Republic.

Ideas in politics must sometimes go underground for a while; the time is not favorable to them. But underground they gather new energy and still work their way into the roots of the nation's life, until the people again feel the need for them. One day some new president will find other words to summon the people from their private pursuits to remember their obligations to the Union, the Republic, the *Res Publica*—the state.

—February 3, 1986

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Dodd Complex

The father, the son, and a Connecticut dynasty in peril.

SUZY KHIMM

"It's a rough patch I'm going through," says Chris Dodd. How rough? Not long ago, Dodd entertained dreams of ascending to the White House. He moved his family to Iowa in 2007 and enrolled his daughter in a Des Moines public school, all in the hope of winning the state's caucus. He gave solid (if never spectacular) performances in debates while fund-raising prodigiously. And, though he didn't vault into the top tier of candidates, he managed to end his bid for the presidency with his long-standing reputation as a serious player in Democratic politics basically intact.

Today, Dodd—five-term senator, established Washington powerbroker, the man whose "magnificent handshake," *The New York Times* gushed two years ago, is "the grip of a pro, a … political pro, which he is"—has been reduced to shoring up his liberal bona fides by railing against credit card companies on a blog called *My Left Nutmeg* (motto: "Where Connecticut Dems Scratch That Progressive Itch"). Despite representing a solidly blue state, he is, in his own words, an "underdog" in his reelection bid—perhaps the most vulnerable Democratic incumbent in the Senate. His approval rating has plummeted to the low 30s, and he trails Rob Simmons, his likely GOP challenger, by an astonishing 16 points.

The source of Dodd's problems is simple: He has become a symbol of Wall Street's grip on the federal government. Having served on the banking committee since 1981, and as its chairman since 2007, Dodd is one of the Senate's largest recipients of campaign contributions from that sector of the economy. Last summer, allegations emerged that he had received an especially sweet rate on his mortgage from one of the culprits in the subprime mess. And, in March, he managed to become wrapped up in the AIG bonus scandal, with critics blaming him (more than a bit unfairly, it turns out) for having maneuvered in Congress to protect the controversial bonuses. The case against Dodd may be a left-populist one, but Republicans have been more than happy to pile on. Simmons boils down the critique to a single catchphrase: "Chris Dodd has gone Washington."

But the commonly held perception of the Connecticut senator as an entrenched, almost anachronistic pawn of moneyed interests misses a critical layer of complexity. Dodd's public life has been shaped by the hovering presence of his father, Tom Dodd, who was drummed out of the Senate in 1970 after being censured for misusing campaign funds. The son, who arrived in the Senate ten years later, has spent his career pulled in two opposing directions: on the one hand, following in his father's footsteps by becoming one of the Old Bulls ensconced in Washington's corridors of privilege, the image that is now causing him such political headaches; but, on the other hand, presenting himself as the very antithesis of an old-style senator—a changemaker, a populist, an insurgent. Dodd, it seems, has never entirely decided whether he wants to be his father or what his father was not. Now, his political survival depends on his ability to present himself as the latter—and escape the ghost of Tom Dodd once and for all.

Chris Dodd, age 8, stands in front of his family in 1953.

AP PHOTO/HENRY BURROUGHS

In a photo included in *Letters from Nuremberg: My Father's Narrative of a Quest for Justice*, Dodd appears as a toddler sitting on the lap of a silver-haired man bearing a heavy brow line. "Tom with son Christopher, whom he called his 'shadow,' because he followed him everywhere (even, eventually, to Washington, D.C.)," the caption reads. The descendant of working-class Irish immigrants and a staunch Catholic, Tom Dodd projected the image of a prim and proper gentleman, favoring bow ties and carefully combed-back hair. Having risen to fame as a prosecutor—most notably at the Nuremberg trials—Dodd came into the House in 1952, then the Senate in 1958, with an impeccable reputation. In Congress, he quickly established himself as a hardline anti-communist who was an ardent supporter of the Vietnam War and the installment of strongman Carlos Castillo Armas in Guatemala, for whom he had once been a paid legal adviser. Though the elder Dodd did take some liberal stances—he championed gun control, for one thing—his foreign policy views and moralizing against the "broads, bosoms, and fun" of popular culture placed him toward the conservative end of the Democratic Party.

Dodd quickly ascended to the leadership of key Senate subcommittees, and President Johnson even considered selecting him as a running mate in 1964. But his rapid rise came to a halt in 1966, when he was accused of taking personal money from dinners billed as political fund-raising events and accepting free use of automobiles, among other misdeeds. Dodd stalwartly denied that there was anything sinister about the perks and funds he had received; after he was censured

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by the Senate, *Time* concluded that his most persuasive argument had been "that his colleagues judged him by standards that are unwritten and unresolved." When Democrats refused to nominate him for reelection, Dodd ran as an independent, bringing his son on board to assist with the campaign. In the end, he won just 25 percent of the vote and died of a heart attack six months later.

Only 26 years old at the time, the younger Dodd always regarded the entire episode as deeply unjust. But that didn't stop him from seeking to return to the place that had destroyed his father. With the support of his friends and father's allies, Chris ran for a Connecticut House seat in 1974 and won the election handily. Given what befell his father, he was especially scrupulous while fund-raising for that race. "He recognized that he had to be holier than Caesar's wife in terms of his fund-raising and his approach to politics," his first campaign finance chairman told NPR. Six years later, when he ran for the Senate, he made clear that he wanted to take up his father's legacy. "I felt the presence of my father very strongly," Dodd said in his 1980 acceptance speech for the Democratic nomination. At his Senate swearing-in ceremony, Dodd wore his father's pocket watch fob and sat in his old chair, then later hung a large oil portrait of the patriarch in his office. "I had a great deal of respect for public service and my father's work in his life," Dodd tells me. "A great deal of respect and a rough ending, as you know—I was mindful of that as a child and a son."

Upon entering the Senate, Dodd set his own course as a legislator, staking out positions antithetical to his father's record as he firmly aligned himself with the progressive wing of the party. As early as 1983, the right-wing publication *Human Events* called his political career an "odyssey from liberalism to far left." Whereas his father had been a staunch anti-communist, Dodd broke from the center of the party by opposing aid to the Contras as a "deal with the devil." On the domestic front, he made his reputation as a dyed-in-the-wool liberal by authoring the Family and Medical Leave Act and engaging in a decades-long push for credit-card and bankruptcy reform. "All the money and all the power was on the side of the credit industry," says Elizabeth Warren, head of the Congressional Oversight Panel for TARP. "A lot of people thought this was an easy one to give to the banks. … Dodd did what was hard, but what was right."

And yet, as a longtime member of the Senate Banking Committee (and its current chairman), Dodd has also become fully immersed in the world of deep-pocketed donors and Beltway privilege—the same world that brought down his father. A former legislative aide told the *Times* in 1991 that the senator has always tried to play it both ways, "with one foot in the front door, the progressive room, and one foot in the back door, the smoke-filled room." Dodd's connections to the old Senate establishment helped fuel his rapid rise as a legislator. Shortly after arriving in the Senate, he fell in quickly with some powerful former colleagues of his father, including then–Finance Committee Chairman Russell Long. "People helped Chris because of his father—he kind of had a head start," says Connecticut AFL-CIO chairman John Olsen, a member of the state Democratic committee at the time. Dodd's skill at working the Senate's back channels led him to become a key dealmaker in ways that at least partly aligned him with powerful interests. In 1999, he played a pivotal role in the passage of the Gramm-Leach-Bliley Act, which allowed commercial and investment banks to consolidate. Dodd wasn't one of the architects of the bill, but he was asked to intervene when the legislative debate had reached an impasse. "It was late at night, everybody was tired—we needed someone in the room to get the sides to stop bickering and work it out," says Ed Yingling, president of the American Bankers Association, whose own father had lobbied Tom Dodd in the 1950s when the senator was on the banking committee. "He's a guy that people can rely on to bridge differences." Just a few years earlier, in 1995, Dodd had been the chief Democratic sponsor of a bill that shielded corporate law firms and accounting firms from class-action lawsuits—a central plank of Newt Gingrich's Contract With America.

For more coverage of Capitol Hill politics, check out **THE PLANK** *at www.tnr.com*

Now, his reputation for a certain coziness with big business and the Washington establishment is coming back to haunt him. When allegations surfaced last year that Dodd had received a preferential rate from Countrywide, he insisted that the VIP treatment was a courtesy for anyone with top-notch credit. Much like his father, Dodd will have committed a cultural and ethical transgression, not a criminal one, if the allegation ultimately proves true. Even the head of Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington (CREW)—which filed the complaint behind the Senate Ethics Committee's investigation into Dodd—says she doesn't expect him to be found guilty of any serious wrongdoing. "They will probably use it as a teaching moment to reiterate rules about gifts," says Melanie Sloan, CREW's executive director. "The ethics committee has taken much less action on much more serious violations." But, as the economy went into free fall, the $75,000 that Dodd saved through Countrywide came across as an egregious affront to Connecticut voters. And Dodd only compounded the problem by being slow to release the paperwork behind the deal.

Then, in March, Dodd became the prime target in the popular uproar surrounding the bonuses given to AIG employees. Dodd originally had written an amendment to curb the payments, but the Obama administration pressured him to change the wording and let the bonuses through. Dodd flubbed his response in the media—first denying that he had anything to do with preserving the bonuses, then revising his story after his involvement became apparent. The charge that he was simply in the pocket of AIG was clearly unfair. But Dodd's status as the leading recipient of AIG campaign money, on top of the Countrywide scandal, only reinforced the mounting public perception that he had grown too close to the financial industry. Connecticut Democrats, not surprisingly, are starting to panic. "[Voters] feel that he hasn't really properly explained himself to people who are critical of the accumulated events," Nick Paindiris, a member of the state Democratic committee, told *National Journal* last month. "It's a real problem that, in my judgment, will not go away."

"He was charged with no crime," Dodd has written of his father, "and broke no law. … He always argued that he had done nothing wrong. But the job that he adored was gone." As he scrambles to escape the same fate four decades later, the younger Dodd is trying mightily to put a positive spin on his recent travails—telling me recently that he felt he had caught something of a break by becoming enmeshed in controversy so early in the election cycle. "I'm getting prepared and ready probably earlier than most," he says. "This is, in a sense, a gift—to know what it's like." Then again, after witnessing what happened to his father, Chris Dodd probably shouldn't have needed the reminder. ◆

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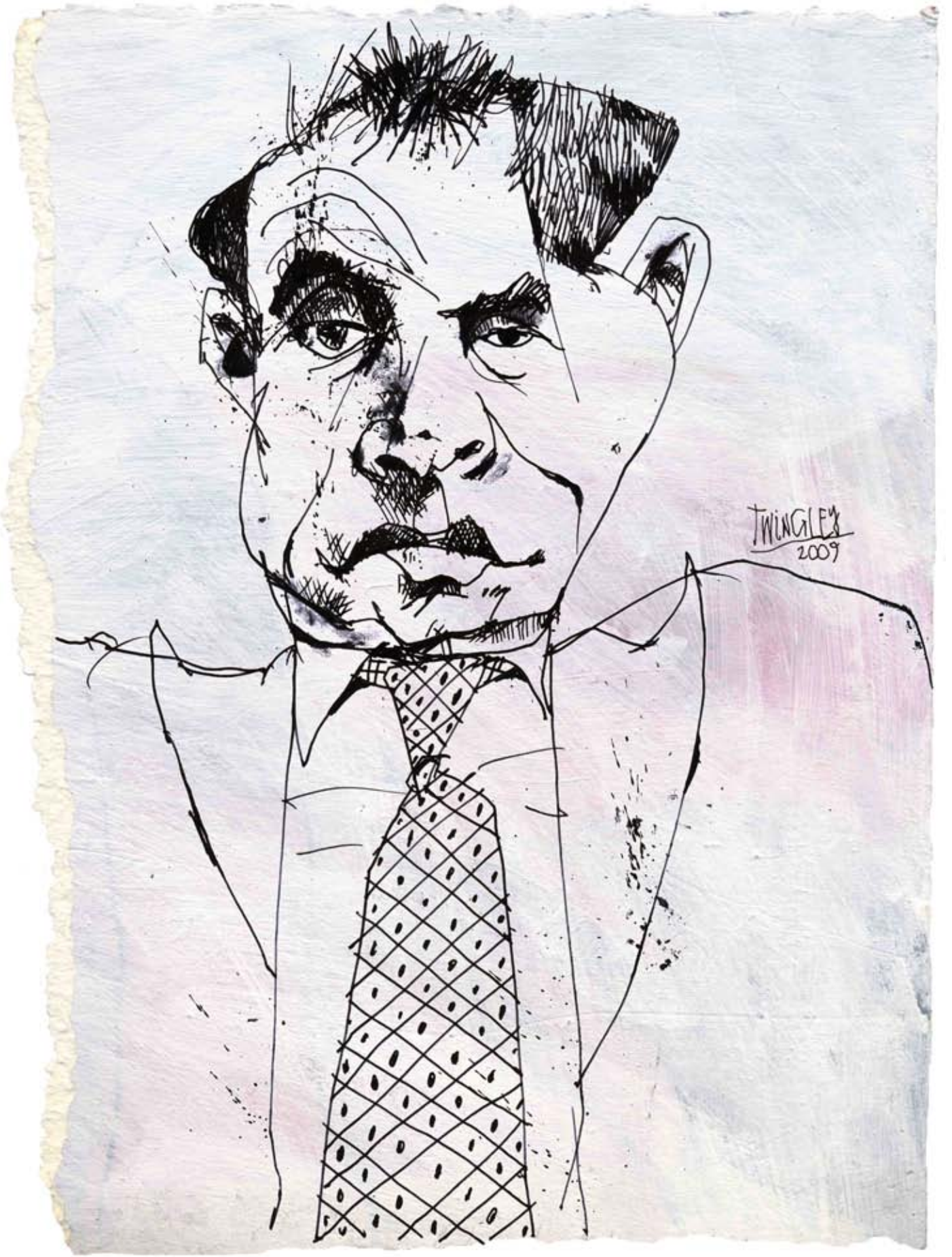

Jonathan Twingley

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Prophet Motive

Is Nouriel Roubini lucky or just good?

JULIA IOFFE

This year, Nouriel Roubini, the economist known to the general public as Dr. Doom, Prophet of the Financial Apocalypse, spent the early hours of Mardi Gras on the floor of the Frankfurt Stock Exchange. It was only 11 a.m., but the party was rollicking. Traders careened around the floor, hooting and honking, dressed as dragons and devils and convicts. Rock music roared overhead, and no one seemed to care that, by the bye, the market had tanked. Tickled, Roubini registered the flicker of amusement on his Twitter thread: "Nouriel is at the Frankfurt Stock Exchange," he wrote, "where everyone is dressed in Mardi Gras costumes even if the market is down 2.5%."

Roubini has always been a *bon vivant*—a trait that has mesmerized the tabloids ever since Facebook photos surfaced of him, the professional pessimist, partying . . . *with women*. But, today, there was no time to celebrate. First, he had to go see Axel Weber, head of the nearby German Central Bank, to discuss "how the German taxpayer is going to have to bail out the lazy Italians and the lazy Greeks," who were up to their eyebrows in debt. Then there was a panel discussion with finance gurus Robert Merton and Stephen Ross; there were clients to counsel, a keynote address to deliver, and e-mails, hundreds of e-mails, slowly piling up in the BlackBerry on his belt. By the time he responded to the ones worth responding to and updated his blog, it was nearing 4 a.m., and he only had time to sneak in a few hours of sleep before another day of flights, meetings, conferences, and TV appearances.

When I caught up with Roubini three days later, he was draped over a booth in an Upper East Side diner, his hair rumpled, collar undone. The speckled blue tie he had worn on Maria Bartiromo's show that afternoon was gone. His speech was still a rapid spit-out of facts and favored metaphors (the government "cannot be half-pregnant" with the banks), with modifiers in just the wrong places ("I was all day long giving talks"), but it was disembodied: Roubini was wiped and having a hard time propping himself up.

Now that his early prophesies of a "bloodbath" have come to pass, Roubini's star is at its apex, and everyone wants a little ray of its gloomy light. This includes his editors at *Forbes*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and a growing number of other publications; his students at NYU, where he is a popular tenured professor; and his consultancy's swelling portfolio of clients—the World Bank, IMF, 50 central banks, and 30-odd finance ministries among them. He also appears on CNBC almost every day. He is a curious presence on the network—the antipode to its yawping, fratty ethos—and he is trotted out to play the foil, delivering bad news with a dark and steady gaze, punctuated by the occasional impish smile. It's good for business, Roubini admits, but he makes no secret of his contempt for the network's roster of "perma-bulls who declare that this is the dramatic and cathartic event that signals the bottom of the crisis, and recovery is three months ahead."

"What a delusion," Roubini sniffs.

Though he hasn't attacked the Obama administration's policies with Paul Krugman's fury, and though he is no longer the most bearish of the bears, his short-term outlook is still quite bleak: a 36-month downturn, double-digit unemployment, and sluggish, recessionary growth well into 2010. At best.

Roubini is widely seen as an incorrigible pessimist, and, in the years leading up to the crisis, this nose for doom pitted him against his more cautious colleagues in the academy and the regulatory agencies, as well as the ebullient in-house economists at banks and hedge funds. Even those who predicted a downturn didn't recognize the extent of the problem. They homed in only on certain pet indicators—trade imbalances, say—and saw a temporary, contained recession in the works. Roubini, on the other hand, saw something else entirely. Like a good mechanic or internist, he understood the wiring. He knew, for instance, that current-account deficits were integral to the housing bubble, and that those two factors linked up to countless other factors at home and abroad. So he took what, back in 2004, was just a hunch—there is a foreign-financed bubble in the United States—and eventually pushed it, step by logical step, into a Socratic cul de sac: We are headed for an unmitigated financial disaster that will completely change the way the world does business and leave no one untouched. The theory seemed far-fetched, even hysterical—until it came true.

By calling the recession, Roubini has traveled from the Jeremiah wilderness to become one of the world's central economic authorities. So, does he have a unique ability to penetrate data, or was he simply a relentless pessimist the business cycle was eventually bound to vindicate? Is he our great economic seer, or did he just get lucky?

Roubini can be a pleasantly phlegmatic man, but, whatever the topic, he almost always positions himself as a clear-eyed outsider battling against the half-wits. "Silly" is one of his favorite adjectives, as is "ridiculous." When we met in New York, he wasted little time in dismantling the myth of his newfound stardom. "People sometimes write these articles saying, 'He was an obscure academic professor and now he's become a rock star,'" he said, one arm absently bumping an increasingly irritated man enjoying a club sandwich behind him.

Then there is the problem of Roubini's pop-culture image: Dr. Doom, the partying pessimist. He hates both parts of the packaging. "In many ways the Dr. Doom moniker is inappropriate," he punched into his BlackBerry, unprompted, one very early morning in New Delhi. "I turned out to be much more of a realist than a pessimist, grounded in reality rather than living in a bubble of delusions about how bad things would get." And he flares at any mention of his reputation as a playboy, accusing Nick Denton, the publisher of Gawker Media and the main peddler of these allegations, of anti-Semitism (Denton's mom is Jewish).

If Roubini slides easily into the role of victim, it's a stance that his ancestral history may have predisposed him to. The Roubinis are from Mashad, a city on the eastern fringe of

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Iran and the resting place of the Imam Reza, the eighth of the twelve Shia imams. This made Mashad a major religious hub and, thus, a difficult place for its Jewish community, the Roubinis included, to live. The city's Muslims and Jews, however, managed to maintain a tense equilibrium for centuries until, in 1839, a Jewish woman got a strange prescription for an abscess on her hand: cut open a puppy, stick your hand in its innards, hold for an hour. She carefully followed the Muslim doctor's advice, but got the timing wrong, killing the dog on a major Muslim feast day. This was interpreted as a mockery of the holiday, and the town exploded in violence. When it was over, 36 Mashadi Jews were dead and the rest were forced to convert to Islam, an event that came to be called the Allahdad. For the next century, until the Iranian state slowly loosened its grip in the 1940s, the Jews had to secretly keep their faith while maintaining an elaborately Islamic façade.

The trauma of the Allahdad forged a strong insularity among the Mashadi Jews, one they maintain even in the exile of Long Island and Israel—and it gave them the sense that the unimaginably bad is nearly always possible. "It's like a big tribe," Roubini says. "They mate among each other; they don't even mix with other Jews."

Roubini himself was born in 1958, not in Mashad, but in Istanbul, where his parents had a short layover before moving on to Tehran, Tel Aviv, and, finally, Milan, where the family set up its Oriental rug business and lives to this day. Because they arrived in Italy when they were young, Nouriel and his two brothers, born one after the other in the span of 21 months, were able to duck right into Italian society (though they spoke Farsi at home) and, in the typical way of first-generation immigrant children, disappear. The Roubini boys came to immerse themselves in politics during the 1970s, when Italy was rocked by social unrest and domestic terrorism; according to his youngest brother David, Nouriel began leading student assemblies on the events of the day. "I was like everybody else, the son of a good upper-middle-class family, and like many of my generation, I was socially conscious," Roubini says. "I wanted to make the world a better world. And, probably, my interest in economics came from my interest in politics."

The interest was largely incomprehensible to Roubini's parents. In the Mashadi community, a boy was expected to go into his father's line of work; many didn't finish high school. "Unlike Ashkenazi Jews, Middle Eastern Jews put less emphasis on education," Nouriel explains. "They were more about business. There was no particular impetus to learn. So I'm a little bit like an outsider because I broke out of it."

He has remained an outsider ever after, never fully inhabiting any role or place since his grad-school days at Harvard, when he was able to pursue a blend of academic economics with tangible questions of policy. After seven years of teaching at Yale, he was drawn south, to New York, to fill the cultural void that New Haven had opened in his life. (He missed the opera in particular. At one Yale party, an advisee's wife walked in on Roubini and four other economists ripping through the Catalogue Aria from *Don Giovanni*, a list of the paramour's conquests: "In Italy, six hundred and forty; / In Germany, two hundred and thirty-one; / A hundred in France; in Turkey, ninety-one; / But in Spain already one thousand and three.")

But, at NYU in the mid-'90s, he wasn't fully comfortable, either, and was drawn south again—this time to the policy battles of Washington, where he served briefly at the World Bank and the IMF, before deciding to abandon academia for a while and adopt the life of a bureaucrat at the White House and Treasury (where he was Timothy Geithner's adviser). That, too, did not satisfy him for long. Two years later, he was back in New York, trying again to fuse economic policy with theory, and, in 2005, he added another element to the mix: RGE Monitor, a multimillion-dollar international consultancy.

The crisis has blessed Roubini with fame, wealth (mid-recession, RGE is still growing), and odes from his peers. Nassim Taleb, who also predicted a catastrophe in his book *The Black Swan*, calls Roubini "the best living economist"; heavyweights like Brad Setser, Simon Johnson, and Kenneth Rogoff were nearly as flattering in their appraisals. And yet, Roubini still sees himself as outnumbered and put-upon, the man no one will listen to until it is too late.

He also bristles at anything that smells remotely of constriction. When two people from the notoriously on-message Obama campaign approached Roubini and asked him to come onboard last year, he declined. Though Roubini had been happy doing policy in the late '90s, he had chafed at working longer days for half the money, and his recommendations were being shorn of their Roubini-esque fullness. "When I was in government, every word I said in public, I had to clear it with general counsel," Roubini says. "I prefer to be a free thinker and be able to write daily without having to worry about that."

Before they left for Washington late last year, he told his old colleagues Geithner and Larry Summers that, though they were free to contact him, he was happy directing policy indirectly, on television or on his blog. "I cannot do everything," he says. "You have to choose."

Some economists—strict academics mostly—have long considered Roubini a quack. They sneer at his approach, which is wide, deep, and deeply unconventional. When he travels, for instance, he says his research includes talking to "everyone from the airport cab driver all the way to the finance minister." One prominent economist who studies recession indicators recently slammed Roubini for his "subjective," "wild man" predictions because they don't always rely on econometric modeling. And Roubini certainly didn't help his case at an IMF conference in September 2006, when he guesstimated

HIROKO MASUIKE/THE NEW YORK TIMES/REDUX

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the chances of a world recession at 70 percent before offering, by way of explanation, that he had pulled the number "just out of my nose."

Anirvan Banerji, an economist with the Economic Cycle Research Institute, has been particularly dismissive of Roubini's forecasting abilities: "The average time between recessions is about five years in the postwar period," he says. "So, if you forecast a recession one year and it doesn't happen, and you repeat your forecast year after year … at some point the recession will arrive."

And Roubini has undeniably overshot. In 2004, he predicted that the oncoming recession would precipitate the crash of the dollar. The crisis has mainly buoyed it. On September 1, 2005, three days after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, Roubini told Reuters that economic disaster was imminent. What followed instead was a bump in financial activity that forestalled the recession for more than two years.

All the while, though, Roubini understood better than anyone just how weak the fundamentals of our economy were. The day after the now-famous 2006 IMF talk, he went on "Kudlow & Company," on CNBC. Roubini was, as always, the foil to Kudlow's chipperness. "All my friends are in a great mood, Nouriel. They're in a terrific mood. They love America," Kudlow sang. Roubini countered starkly: "Well, they're all rich," he said. "The average American actually is in debt"—a sign to Roubini that housing would only be the catalyst of something larger.

What sets Roubini apart from his fellow economists (and what occasionally gets him in trouble) is his willingness to intuit broad patterns and connect the dots, something that became apparent early in his career. While others spent years refining one econometric model or drilling down on one microsubject, Roubini gorged on a range of diverse topics that, to him, were all related: Japanese public debt, tax evasion, liquidity and exchange rates, monetary policy in the newly formed European Union, the effect of political cycles on industrial economies. As a graduate student, he attracted the attention of older, more established academics both for his ambitiously sweeping econometric analyses and his ability to synthesize vast swaths of seemingly unrelated information.

But the first real test of Roubini's eclectic methodology didn't come until 1997. That summer, the government of Thailand—highly in debt and over-leveraged after a long and poorly regulated real-estate boom—cut its currency from its peg to the dollar. Investors panicked, and Thailand's surging economy froze, triggering massive layoffs in real estate, finance, and construction. The crisis, which quickly spread to the rest of the region, took most economists by surprise.

Roubini, by then a young professor at NYU, was trying to stay on top of the rapidly shifting situation in Asia for a class he was teaching. He found it nearly impossible until he hit on a relatively new technology: a website. He hired some students versed in HTML and set up the Asia Crisis Homepage. The bright yellow portal pooled news reports, academic work, and policy debates on the subject, filtering, organizing, and contextualizing the information in real time under no fewer than 32 headings.

Wading through the data on Thailand, Roubini found that corruption and bad policy created a vacuum that sucked in a flood of foreign capital. This skewed the country's financial reality and accelerated an unsustainable boom. (Roubini later spotted this distinctive pattern in the United States when the Chinese, Russians, and Gulf states were hungrily snapping up U.S. debt and inundating the market with foreign cash.) But, at the height of the Asian financial crisis, Roubini was, again, in the minority. Many economists saw it as a simple comedy of errors: Misinformed investors panicked, they said, and pulled the rug out from under the Thais. Roubini, on the other hand, saw the crisis as a systemic failure rooted in Thailand's policies. And he was right.

More than a decade later, Roubinism—sprawling, non-linear, and hypercaffeinated—looks pretty much the same. His prescient February 2008 blog post that predicted the Rube Goldbergian collapse of the world financial system, for example, was called "The Twelve Steps to Financial Disaster," but, if you include all the sub-steps and sub-sub-steps, the real number is likely twice that. On television, his talking points are similarly pluralized, rushing out quickly, like a magician's scarves, to a grand and logical finale. (At the diner, I clocked him: 295 words on the intricacies of the European monetary crisis in under 90 seconds.) This, of course, means that brevity goes out the window. Roubini's weekly Web column for *Forbes* comes in at close to 3,000 words and runs at half that length. A recent Roubini academic paper tracks no less than 47 emerging countries over the course of 32 years using more than 50 variables. Giancarlo Corsetti, who was Roubini's advisee at Yale and is now a frequent collaborator, presents with Roubini at conferences, and sometimes finds this expansive approach frustrating. "I go up, I present one or two points," Corsetti says. "Nouriel goes up and gives you twenty-six points, three or four of which are contradictory."

Robert Shiller, who also worked with him at Yale and was one of the first people to warn of a housing bust, isn't surprised that Roubini, of all the great minds staring down our financial future, emerged as the one to piece it together. "A financial crisis needs general thinking, and a team of specialists will have difficulty understanding the whole thing," he says. "Nouriel's approach has always been worldwide, which is not rewarded in academia. There's an element of luck in everything, but it's not random who he is."

THIS IS WHAT the life of a prophet looks like: Two days after we met at the diner, Roubini is back at the airport. He's off on another long jag—four continents, seven countries, eight cities, ten days.

He's been thinking a lot not just about the way down but the way out. With the help of the Obama administration's policies (not great, he says, but better than nothing), he sees "a light at the end of the tunnel." To actually get to the end of it, though, the United States will have to get used to consuming less, which means China, Germany, and Japan will have to get used to producing less, which means that all the intermediaries—Chile, Australia, Brazil—will have to scale back and turn inward like everyone else. The world may curve and warp a bit, and it will be difficult, but Roubini sees good in this. Given the right changes, perhaps the United States can develop with the productive long view in mind, and maybe its human talent can be spread more equitably. "When you have more financial engineers than computer engineers, you know that the brightest minds have gone into something where, probably, the margin was excessive," he had told me earlier. "Maybe some of these bright people are going to do something entrepreneurial, more creative, or go into government. I think that's actually a good change. The transition is painful, but the result may be good."

On the other end of the line, I can hear him fumbling with his luggage as he talks, and there's a sense of noble resignation in his tone. He hasn't had any rest since we met, but, he insists, "I cannot get sick. I can't stop." His is hard, life-shortening work, but someone has to tell the world that only its wholesale rewiring will get us out of this. ◆

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The Drone War

Are Predators our best weapon or worst enemy?

PETER BERGEN and KATHERINE TIEDEMANN

The Al Qaeda videotape shows a small white dog tied up inside a glass cage. A milky gas slowly filters in. An Arab man with an Egyptian accent says: "Start counting the time." Nervous, the dog starts barking and then moaning. After flailing about for some minutes, it succumbs to the poisonous gas and stops moving.

This experiment almost certainly occurred at the Derunta training camp near the eastern Afghan city of Jalalabad, conducted by an Egyptian with the nom de jihad of "Abu Khabab." In the late 1990s, under the direction of Al Qaeda's number two, Ayman Al Zawahiri, Abu Khabab set up the terrorist group's WMD research program, which was given the innocuous codename "Yogurt." Abu Khabab taught hundreds of militants how to deploy poisonous chemicals, such as ricin and cyanide gas. The Egyptian WMD expert also explored the possible uses of radioactive materials, writing in a 2001 memo to his superiors, "As you instructed us you will find attached a summary of the discharges from a traditional nuclear reactor, among which are radioactive elements that could be used for military operations." In the memo, Abu Khabab asked if it were possible to get more information about the matter "from our Pakistani friends who have great experience in this sphere." This was likely a reference to the retired Pakistani senior nuclear scientists who were meeting then with Osama bin Laden.

In the pandemonium following the fall of the Taliban in the winter of 2001, Abu Khabab disappeared into the badlands on the Afghan-Pakistani border. The United States put a $5 million bounty on his head and, in January 2006, attempted to kill him and Zawahiri while they were believed to be in the Pakistani hamlet of Damadola, targeting them with a missile launched by a drone aircraft.

Initial press reports said that Abu Khabab was killed in the strike, but, when the dust cleared, 25 civilians, including a half-dozen kids, were dead—and Abu Khabab was not among them. Unsurprisingly, the civilian death toll sparked protests in the region. In one, several thousand tribesmen chanted "Death to America," and the issue of innocents killed by U.S. rockets quickly became a potent Pakistani Taliban propaganda point. A couple of weeks after the botched missile strike, Zawahiri himself appeared in a videotape, saying that the Damadola strike was a "failure" and taunting President Bush as a "butcher."

More than two years later, on July 28, 2008, a U.S. drone finally killed Abu Khabab in the Pakistani tribal region of South Waziristan (along with two other militants and three boys who happened to be in the strike zone). The assassination of the WMD expert marked the beginning of a vastly ramped-up program to take out Al Qaeda's leaders using missiles launched by U.S. drones. President Obama has not only continued the drone program, he has ratcheted it up further. In 2007, there were three drone strikes in Pakistan; in 2008, there were 34; and, in the first months of 2009, the Obama administration has already authorized 16.

The drone war against Al Qaeda's leaders—and, increasingly, their Pakistani-based Taliban allies—has been waged with little public discussion or congressional investigation of its legality or efficacy, even though the offensive is essentially a program of assassination that kills not only militant leaders, but also civilians in a country that is, at least nominally, a close ally of the United States. Nor has there been a substantive debate about whether the gains of winnowing the ranks of Al Qaeda's leadership outweigh the fact that the inevitable civilian casualties are a superb recruiting tool for the Pakistani Taliban. Indeed, the drone strikes have pushed militants deeper into Pakistan and given them an excuse to strike the heartland of the country, further destabilizing the already rickety government in Islamabad. All of which raises the question of whether the drone campaign, however useful in the short term, might fatally undermine U.S. efforts to stabilize the region and to win the long-term war against Al Qaeda and its allies.

Officially, the United States does not assassinate people. In the aftermath of the Church Committee investigations—which uncovered eight plots to kill Fidel Castro—Presidents Ford and Carter both signed executive orders banning assassinations. In practice, however, presidents have signed off on missions to kill political leaders who have ordered attacks on Americans. Ronald Reagan authorized air strikes on one of Muammar Qaddafi's residences in 1986, after Libyan agents bombed a German bar frequented by U.S. military personnel. And President Clinton ordered a cruise missile attack on an Al Qaeda camp after learning that the terrorist network was responsible for the 1998 bombings of the American Embassies in Kenya and Tanzania.

Legally, successive administrations have justified these exceptions by arguing that the assassination ban does not apply to enemy commanders. Under this interpretation, Al Qaeda and Taliban leaders are fair game. President Bush authorized several targeted killings in the first years after the September 11 attacks. In November 2001, a drone strike near Kabul killed Mohammed Atef, Al Qaeda's military commander. Atef, whose daughter married one of Osama bin Laden's sons, was a close confidante of the Al Qaeda leader. A year later, one of the suspected planners of the 2000 attack on the USS *Cole*, Abu Ali Al Harethi, was killed by a drone in Yemen—the first such strike outside of Afghanistan. Also killed in the attack was Kamal Derwish, an American in cahoots with Al Qaeda and the first U.S. citizen to die in a CIA drone strike.

The relatively slow pace of drone attacks against Al Qaeda's leaders quickened dramatically in the waning months of the Bush administration after it had become clear that the terror group was reconstituting itself in Pakistan's tribal regions. In July 2007, the 16 agencies that make up the U.S. intelligence community released a National Intelligence Estimate assessing that Al Qaeda was resurging and warning that it "has protected or regenerated key elements of its Homeland attack capability, including a safe haven in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA)."

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What particularly alarmed Bush administration officials was the mounting evidence that Al Qaeda and affiliated groups were using the FATA to train Westerners for attacks on American and European targets. For instance, the masterminds of the July 7, 2005, attacks in London, which killed 52 people, had trained in the tribal regions. So too had the leaders of the summer 2006 plot to use liquid explosives to bring down seven Canadian and U.S. passenger jets leaving Heathrow. Two Germans and one Turk who were planning to bomb the U.S. Air Force base in Ramstein, Germany in 2007 had trained with an Al Qaeda affiliate in the tribal areas. And, during this period, both bin Laden and Zawahiri, who are generally presumed to be living in or around the FATA, and, in July, continued to release a stream of audio- and videotapes demonstrating that the Al Qaeda leadership was very much intact.

At the same time, despite "peace agreements" that the Pakistani government had negotiated with the Taliban in 2005 and 2006, the number of attacks into Afghanistan by militants crossing the border was increasing exponentially. And the violence from the FATA-based groups began blowing back into Pakistan itself. More Pakistani citizens died in militant violence in 2007 than had died in the six previous years combined.

By early 2008, the Bush administration had tired of the Pakistani government's unwillingness or inability to take out the militants in the FATA, and in July the president authorized Special Operations forces to carry out ground assaults in the tribal regions without the prior permission of the Pakistani government. On September 3, 2008, a team of Navy SEALs based in Afghanistan crossed the Pakistani border into South Waziristan to attack a compound housing militants. Twenty of the occupants were killed, most of them women and children. The Pakistani press picked up on the attack, and the assault sparked vehement objections from Pakistani officials, who protested that it violated their national sovereignty. Army chief of staff Afshaq Parvez Kayani bluntly said that Pakistan's "territorial integrity … will be defended at all costs," suggesting that any future insertion of American soldiers into Pakistan would be met by force.

In the face of the intense Pakistani opposition to American boots on the ground, the Bush administration chose to rely on drones to target suspected militants. Bush ordered the CIA to expand its attacks with Predator and Reaper drones, and, according to a former Bush administration official familiar with the program, the U.S. government stopped notifying Pakistani officials when strikes were imminent or obtaining their "concurrence" for the attacks. As a result, the time that it took for a target to be identified and engaged dropped from many hours to 45 minutes.

The Predators and Reapers are operated by a squadron of pilots stationed in Nevada and are equipped to drop Hellfire missiles and JDAM bombs, respectively. More than two-dozen feet in length, the drones linger over the tribal areas looking for targets. Between July 2008 and the time he left office, President Bush authorized 30 Predator and Reaper strikes on Pakistani territory, compared to the six strikes that the CIA had launched during the first half of the year, a fivefold increase.

The Taliban consistently have claimed that those killed in the attacks are civilians, while U.S. and Pakistani officials generally say that they are militants. The truth is, of course, a mix of both, but it's impossible to give an accurate breakdown of the death toll because the militants live among the civilian population and don't wear uniforms. Based on our analysis of reliable accounts in the Pakistani and U.S. press, the drone attacks have killed around 600 militants and civilians since 2006, two-thirds of them in the past two years. This figure is roughly the same as the number that Amir Mir, a well-regarded Pakistani terrorism expert, arrived at for the same time period. Mir puts the total number of deaths caused by drone attacks during the past three-and-half years at 700, although he asserts that the vast majority of casualties have been civilians, something that is, in fact, impossible to establish definitively.

It is possible to say with some certainty that since the summer of 2008 U.S. drones have killed dozens of lower-ranking militants and at least ten mid- and upper-level leaders within Al Qaeda or the Taliban. One of them was Abu Laith Al Libi, who orchestrated a 2007 suicide attack targeting Vice President Dick Cheney while he was visiting Bagram air base in Afghanistan. Al Libi was then described as the number-three man in the Al Qaeda hierarchy, perhaps the most dangerous job in the world, given that the half-dozen or so men who have occupied that position have ended up dead or in prison.

Other leading militants killed in the drone strikes include Abu Sulayman Al Jazairi, an Algerian jihadist; Abu Khabab, the WMD expert; Abdul Rehman, a Taliban commander in South Waziristan; Abu Haris, Al Qaeda's chief in Pakistan; Khalid Habib, Abu Zubair Al Masri, and Abdullah Azzam Al Saudi, all of whom were senior members of Al Qaeda; Abu Jihad Al Masri, Al Qaeda's propaganda chief; and Rashid Rauf, a British national

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who is a key suspect in the 2006 plot to bring down U.S. and Canadian airliners (though there is some debate about whether Rauf is actually dead).

One consistent target of the drone attacks has been the South Waziristan strongholds of Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban. American and Pakistani officials identify Mehsud as the mastermind of Benazir Bhutto's assassination in December 2007. So far, Mehsud has managed to evade death. None of the strikes has targeted bin Laden, who seems to have vanished like a wraith.

The pace of drone attacks increased further during the waning days of the Bush administration—likely a legacy-building effort to dismantle the entire Al Qaeda top leadership. Cheney seemed to acknowledge this in an interview with CNN eleven days before Obama took office, saying optimistically of efforts to kill bin Laden, "We've got a few days left yet." A week earlier, the Bush administration had received the welcome news that Osama Al Kini and his lieutenant, Sheik Ahmed Salim Swedan, had been killed by a Hellfire missile launched from a drone over Waziristan. Al Kini and Swedan played a central role in planning the 1998 bombings of the two American embassies in East Africa. In one of his many exit interviews, Bush told Larry King with a slight smirk that bin Laden would eventually be found "just like the people who allegedly were involved in the East African bombings. Couple of them were brought to justice recently."

Officials in both the Bush and Obama administrations have been leery of discussing the highly classified drone program on the record, but a window into their thinking was provided by the remarks of then–CIA director Michael Hayden on November 13, 2008, as the drone program was in full swing. "By making a safe haven feel less safe, we keep Al Qaeda guessing. We make them doubt their allies; question their methods, their plans, even their priorities," he explained. Hayden went on to say that the key outcome of the drone attacks was that "we force them to spend more time and resources on self-preservation, and that distracts them, at least partially and at least for a time, from laying the groundwork for the next attack."

This strategy seems to have worked, at least in terms of the ability of Al Qaeda and other FATA-based militant groups to plan or carry out attacks in the West. Since the summer of 2008, law-enforcement authorities have uncovered no serious plots against U.S. or European targets that have been traceable back to Pakistan's tribal regions.

Privately, American officials rave about the drone program. One former Bush administration official said that the drones had so crimped the militants' activities in FATA that they had begun discussing a move to Yemen or Somalia. Two officials familiar with the drone program point out that the number of "spies" Al Qaeda and the Taliban have killed has risen dramatically in the past year, suggesting that the militants are turning on themselves in an effort to root out the sources of the often pinpoint intelligence that has led to what those officials describe as the deaths of half of the top militant leaders in the FATA.

Daniel Byman, who runs the Security Studies program at Georgetown, has studied the effects that targeted assassinations have on terrorist groups. For years, the Israeli government has mounted assassinations against the leaders of groups like Hamas. Byman found that the dead leaders were replaced by more junior members of the group, "who are not as good; you drive down the age and experience of the leadership." A similar problem appears to be affecting Al Qaeda, according to Dennis Blair, the Director of National Intelligence. In February, he testified to Congress that "replacing the loss of key leaders, since 2008, in Pakistan's Federally Administered Tribal Areas has proved difficult for Al Qaeda."

One way of measuring the pain that the drone program has inflicted on Al Qaeda is the number of audio- and videotapes that the terrorist group has released through its propaganda arm, As Sahab ("the clouds" in Arabic). Al Qaeda takes its propaganda operations seriously; bin Laden has observed that 90 percent of his battle is waged in the media, and Zawahiri has made similar comments. In 2007, As Sahab had a banner year, releasing almost 100 tapes. But the number of releases dropped by half in 2008, indicating that the group's leaders were more concerned with survival than public relations. However, since the beginning of 2009, Al Qaeda is on track to produce a record number of tapes, suggesting that its media arm has moved from the FATA deeper into Pakistan, likely to cities such as Peshawar.

Such a move would be something of a reverse migration. Between 2002 and 2004, Al Qaeda leaders generally preferred the perceived safety of Pakistan's teeming, anonymous cities. In fact, typical urban activities like making cell phone calls or dialing up Internet connections provided many important clues to the whereabouts of Al Qaeda operatives, according to Pakistani intelligence officials. As a result, in the first three years after September 11, key Al Qaeda operatives were captured in cities such as Karachi, Peshawar, Quetta, Faisalabad, Gujrat, and Rawalpindi. Following those arrests, the Al Qaeda leadership largely migrated to the relative safe haven of FATA. Now that haven is safe no more.

While there is little doubt that the strikes have disrupted Al Qaeda's operations, the larger question is to what extent they may have increased the appeal of militant groups and undermined the fragile Pakistani state. Such an outcome would be ultimately a lot more worrisome than anything that could happen in Afghanistan, given that Pakistan has dozens of nuclear weapons and will soon be the fifth most populous country in the world. A militantly anti-American Pakistan would be a major strategic problem for the United States and the West in general.

There is little doubt that the drone program is deeply unpopular among Pakistanis, who see it as an infringement on their sovereignty and who are, in any case, generally anti-American. Today, the United States is viewed favorably by fewer than one in five Pakistanis, and a poll released last year found that 52 percent of respondents blamed the United States for the violence in their country, while only 8 percent blamed Al Qaeda. The militants have actually used the drone attacks as an excuse to strike the Punjabi heartland of the country. In taking credit for the March attack on a Lahore police academy that killed 18 people, Baitullah Mehsud, the leader of the Pakistani Taliban, said it was "in retaliation for the continued drone strikes by the U.S. in collaboration with Pakistan on our people."

The one place the drone strikes do seem popular is in the FATA itself. The Aryana Institute for Regional Research and Advocacy, a Pakistani think tank that does work in the tribal regions, found that more than half the people it polled in the FATA say the drone strikes are accurate and are damaging the militant organizations. Fewer than half said that anti-American sentiment in the area had increased due to the drone attacks. This is perhaps less surprising than it might initially seem; if a bunch of heavily armed religious nutcases took over your neighborhood, you too might not mind if occasionally they were whacked

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by mysterious missiles falling from the sky, whatever their provenance.

Pakistani officials, however, conscious of how unpopular the drone attacks are among the general population, have been at pains to distance themselves from them. In New York last November, President Asif Ali Zardari protested, "It's undermining my sovereignty, and it's not helping win the war on the hearts and minds of people." And, in January, Prime Minister Yousuf Raza Gilani told CNN that there was no agreement between his government and the Americans to allow the strikes. The next month, though, Senator Dianne Feinstein, who is privy to the most sensitive briefings as head of the intelligence committee, inadvertently let the inconvenient truth out of the bag when she said of the drones, "As I understand it, these are flown out of a Pakistani base."

For Pakistani politicians, the drone program is a dream come true. They get to posture to their constituents about the perfidious Americans even as they reap the benefits from the U.S. strikes. They are well-aware that neither the Pakistani Army's ineffective military operations nor the various peace agreements with the militants have done anything to halt the steady Talibanization of their country, while the U.S. drones are the one surefire way to put significant pressure on the leaders of the Taliban and Al Qaeda. This is called getting to have your chapati and eat it too.

JUST THREE DAYS into his presidency, Obama authorized a near-simultaneous pair of drone strikes against targets in North and South Waziristan. Since he took office, there have been a total of 16 airstrikes, or roughly one per week. Our analysis shows that these attacks have killed some 170 people, but only one has killed an important Al Qaeda or Taliban leader, presumably because many of them have decamped from the tribal areas. The ramped-up drone program seems to have hit the point of diminishing returns.

There has been some speculation in the press that the CIA might extend the drone attacks to other parts of Pakistan, in particular the southwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan where the Afghan Taliban is headquartered, but this seems unlikely. The western tribal regions, which have lived under their own legal and social codes for centuries, have never fully been part of Pakistan proper. In fact, the Urdu word for the tribal regions is *ilaqa ghair*, or "foreign area." By contrast, Baluchistan is part and parcel of the Pakistani state. U.S. drone attacks there would almost certainly provoke the same fierce Pakistani pushback that the SEALS' ground incursion into the tribal regions did last year. Shuja Nawaz, the author of *Crossed Swords*, the authoritative history of the Pakistani military, says, "Any drone attack in provinces outside of the tribal regions would be disastrous, totally destroying the American relationship with the army."

There is widespread consensus among national security experts that the drone program is the least bad available option to pressure the Al Qaeda leadership and its Taliban allies. This is because the Pakistani government—divided between a barely functional civilian arm and a strong but unelected army—has wavered between ineffective punitive expeditions against the extremists and appeasement. Neither the military nor the political establishment has articulated an effective plan to rid the country of its jihadist militants. And so, for the moment, the drones are the only game in town.

But the drone program is a tactic, not a strategy. Bruce Hoffman, a professor at Georgetown widely regarded as the dean of terrorism studies, says, "We are deluding ourselves if we think in and of itself the drone program is going to be the answer," pointing out that the 2006 U.S. airstrike which killed the leader of Al Qaeda in Iraq, Abu Musab Al Zarqawi, did not exactly shut down the organization. Following Zarqawi's death, violence in Iraq actually accelerated.

And militant organizations like Al Qaeda are not like an organized crime family, which can be put out of business if most or all of the members of the family are captured or killed. Al Qaeda has sustained and can continue to sustain enormous blows that would put other organizations out of business because the members of the group firmly believe that they are doing God's work.

Effectively challenging the militants will require a sea change in the views of Pakistani citizens and their leaders, who have been conditioned by decades of war and tension with India to believe that the real danger lies to their east instead of their west. Fortunately, if there is a silver lining to the militant atrocities that have plagued Pakistan in the past year and a half, it may be that such a change has begun. The Taliban's assassination of Benazir Bhutto; Al Qaeda's bombing of the Marriott hotel in Islamabad; the attack on the visiting Sri Lankan cricket team in Lahore; the widely circulated video images of the Taliban flogging a 17-year-old girl; a cell phone video recording of militants executing a couple for supposed adultery—each of these has provoked real revulsion among the Pakistani public, which is, in the main, utterly opposed to the militants.

In fact, future historians may record the Taliban's decision to move from the Swat Valley into Buner District, only 60 miles from Islamabad, as the tipping point that finally galvanized the sclerotic Pakistani state to confront the fact that the jihadist monster it had spawned was now trying to swallow its creator. Indeed, lost in all the disturbing pictures of the Taliban advancing on Islamabad are three seismic shifts in the Pakistani political landscape whose importance is rarely discussed today in the U.S. press. First is the lawyers' movement, which lies outside of the control of Pakistan's traditional hidebound party system and was instrumental in pushing dictator General Pervez Musharraf out of power last year. Second is the explosion in independent Pakistani TV stations, which are largely pro-democratic and secular. Third, the alliance of pro-Taliban religious parties known as the MMA was trounced in the 2008 election, earning a miserable 2 percent of the vote, while support for suicide bombing among Pakistanis has plummeted from 33 percent in 2002 to 5 percent in 2008.

Although the political will necessary to wipe out the Taliban is beginning to emerge in both the public and the political establishment, the Pakistani army remains mired in conventional approaches to this unconventional conflict. The fact that hundreds of thousands of refugees have streamed out of Buner and Swat as the army engages the Taliban with artillery and air power indicates that the Pakistani military still lacks the capability and doctrine for successful counterinsurgency operations. Until that changes, U.S. drone operations will likely continue in Pakistan for the foreseeable future because building the capacity for robust counterinsurgency operations takes years, as the U.S. military found to its cost in Iraq. In the meantime, the civilized world can take solace in the fact that Abu Khabab and some of his peers are no longer with us. ◆

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ANTHONY RUSSO

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Stanley Kauffmann on Films

PROGENY

James M. Cain's famous postman not only rings twice, he keeps delivering. Especially on screen. Cain's novel has been filmed twice in Hollywood, as well as in France, Italy, and Greece. Now comes a German film called *Jerichow* whose credits don't mention Cain's book, but very clearly the writer-director, Christian Petzold, has been sparked by its tone and tale.

Petzold's last film, *Yella*, consisted of veristic bits hung on an incredible story. In *Jerichow* the verism is even starker, and, in a reversal of *Yella*, sustains the story. Because we know Cain, we think, as the elements gather, that we know what will happen, but Petzold moves to his own, different finish. The title—the German version of Jericho, I assume—is the name of a town and district west of Berlin that seemingly were designed by Providence in case Petzold ever wanted to make this picture there.

It starts with a funeral, treated in a way that quickly marks Petzold's impatience with cliché. Instead of the usual group around a grave, we see three young men in business suits walking away from the camera. In the background is one gravestone. Immediately we feel a tick of interest.

The men go to the house of one of them, Thomas, or rather his late mother's house. The two other men then demand from Thomas money that he owes them, apparently through some sort of crooked deal. He says he does not have it; they don't believe him. They find the money, clout him, and leave.

So Thomas, beginning with the day of his mother's funeral, is shown to be a native of the shadowy side, a man who lives in a world of money-shuffling and clouting. We subsequently learn that he has been a soldier, was dishonorably discharged, and served two years in prison. He is Cain's taciturn tough guy returned, and he is attractively played by Benno Fürmann.

Fürmann is the kind of actor who seems to have been born on screen. He is about the size of Paul Newman, solid, capable of being meaningfully still, not as handsome as Newman but with a face that sometimes suggests him. Inevitably then, there are also suggestions of Brando, and it is no surprise to learn that Fürmann has worked at the Lee Strasberg studio in New York. Since his character here is a close-mouthed veteran of a private past, he does not need much emotional range—allowing for his later bursts of sex—but Petzold, who has worked with him before, has sensibly depended on Fürmann's aura to revitalize this familiar story.

A few days after the funeral sequence, Thomas is walking along a road, sees a car that has had an accident, and helps the driver. He is Ali, a middle-aged friendly Turk—in Cain, it was a Greek—who is the shrewd owner of forty-five snack shops. Ali is grateful to Thomas for his help and offers him a job. Thomas, largely because he has nothing else to do, accepts. Ali takes him home. Ali has, of course, an attractive bored wife. The Cain triangle is now in place.

JERICHOW
The Cinema Guild

THE WINDOW
Film Movement

One proof of this film's quality is that, even though we know what is being constructed, we want to see what Petzold does with the template. First, his three actors are perfect for their jobs. We already know that Fürmann is one reason that the picture was made. The bagel-faced Hilmi Sözer as Ali is both effusive and foxy, yet manages to convey under his maneuverings a vulnerable human being. Nina Hoss, as Laura, the wife, provides all that she is asked for—without blatantly selling it.

Then, strong as Petzold's triangle is, he insists on seeing his film as more than its five o'clock news story. A big help in this aim is the lighting. With Hans Fromm as his cinematographer, Petzold backlights many of the interior shots. The source of light is on the other side of the characters: thus we frequently see them as dark figures moving through portentous lives. This approach conveys that these three are trapped somberly even before they know it. Petzold's script carries out this fatalistic design. Ali nearly invites Thomas's attentions to Laura—we learn why at the end. Laura thinks she knows what is happening, or is meant to happen, and accepts her role. Thomas, even when he is making love, seems to be watching himself as a character in an inevitable story. In the hottest moments, we can almost hear him murmuring, "So it goes. So it goes."

As the film ends, Petzold's ultimate reason for making another film derived from Cain's book becomes clear and trenchant. Aside from the chance to promote Fürmann, he wanted to show that the finish of Cain's novel is not the only possible one. Destiny, Petzold, tells us, is not necessarily unalterable, Aristotelian. Ironies can occur.

An Argentinean film called *The Window* also derives from a predecessor. Carlos Sorín, who has written and directed six films, says

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that he saw Bergman's *Wild Strawberries* forty years ago and that, in effect, he has been moving toward his own version of that masterpiece ever since. He, I am sure, would be quick to say that he has not matched Bergman. Still, Sorín's long love has some rewards for us.

Like the Bergman work, *The Window* is about an old man and it all takes place in one day. We are in the large country house of an eighty-year-old successful author, Don Antonio. He is unwell. He lies in bed through much of the day, an intravenous nib in his arm, while two devoted maids take care of him. Chatter between servants, one of the most venerable devices in drama, supplies the information that we need. Don Antonio's son is coming today. The son, a well-known pianist, long ago quarreled with his father, and they are about to make up. So we look forward to a family drama that, to judge by the deftness of the opening moments, we want to watch.

The drama never comes—not to any sizable degree. Sorín has other purposes. Some things do happen, but that is hardly a definition of drama. Here are some of the things that happen. The film opens with a dream in which the old man thinks he hears people dancing downstairs and a lovely girl kisses him. His two maids, with their daily routine, come in and bring him back to the present. Don Antonio's doctor, an old friend, arrives to examine him, which he does in a manner that tells us what the doctor thinks without his saying anything. The patient gives his doctor a copy of a Borges first edition that Borges inscribed encouragingly to this author long ago. Don Antonio hopes that he hasn't let Borges down, and the doctor reassures him.

When Don Antonio is left alone, strictly against orders he gets out of bed clutching his infusion jar, finds his jacket and panama hat, and actually goes for a walk outside. It is as if he wanted to see his fields once more, just as he wants to see his son. In the middle of a field he even pees, possibly in pride. But his strength soon falters, and he collapses. Some young people—oh, how young they look—who are touring the countryside come along, and they summon aid.

After Don Antonio is back in bed, his son arrives with his thirtyish wife. The reunion is warm enough—just. The son opens a bottle of champagne that his father has been treasuring for this occasion. It is flat. Don Antonio laughs. They all laugh. The son goes downstairs with the maids, and the wife is left with Don Antonio. Soon the old man asks quietly, "Are they dancing downstairs?" The wife, moved, understands that a dream is happening. She leans forward to kiss him, and in that very last moment—a Bergman touch—we see her in a dress of bygone days.

I have detailed the story because there are so few details. *The Window* screenplay is not dramatic in an orthodox way, or (like Bergman's) a unique one. It is a visit to several lives. This is an idea that appeals to some imaginative film-makers. A recent instance, the South Korean film *Treeless Mountain*, has been criticized for having no developed story. To me, that is like criticizing a string quartet for having no brass. That film was made so that we could spend some time with two little girls. Sorín made his film from—his words in a press statement—"a very weak story in which apparently not very much happened, but I hoped that many things might happen in the spectator's mind." This approach seems to me daring and interesting. The trouble is that not quite enough happens in the spectator's mind.

Much is admirable. Julián Apezteguia's camera leads us into sheer pleasantness. (We are soon tickled by the fact that Don Antonio's bed, in this large well-furnished house, is a plain iron bedstead.) Lesser characters, like the young people who help Don Antonio in the field, like the son's wife, are handled with casual verity. But the two most important people are limitedly characterized. The son is not an individual. Don Antonio is recognizable but insufficiently deep. He is played by Antonio Larreta who has done as much writing and directing—for theater and film—as acting. We can suspect that Sorín knows Larreta well and relied on the richness of the man himself to fulfill the role without having to write it all out for him. This fulfillment doesn't quite happen. So we come away with respect for Sorín's intent, affection for much of what he has done, and a wish that we had been too overwhelmed to put our response so calmly. ◆

David Hajdu on Music
MUSIC IN THE MELTDOWN

When all this is over, the economic crisis will take lasting form in the American consciousness as a video montage. The images are already familiar: traders gaping in horror at the Stock Exchange … Paulsen testifying before Congress … A foreclosure notice tacked onto a front-porch door … Obama selling the bailout … The Chrysler headquarters posted for sale on Craigslist (well, not really, not yet). It is as easy to envision this string of images as it is to conjure a mental highlight reel of the visual iconography of the Great Depression: the Dust Bowl photography of Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans, newsreel clips of bread lines and Hooverville shacks—and all of it set to the sound of Rudy Vallee singing "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" What, then, will play on the soundtrack of the montage of the current crisis? What is the music of our meltdown?

Last time around, popular culture moved a bit more slowly than it does in the Tweet era. The Tin Pan Alley composer Jay Gorney and the lyricist Yip Harburg did not write "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" until 1931, two years after Black Thursday. The song was not introduced until 1932, when it was inserted into a gently socio-political Broadway revue called *New Americana*, and it was not a hit until Rudy Vallee and Bing Crosby took it on, in shifts of mode for them both. Vallee's and Crosby's records of the same song ended up among the top-ten hits of 1932.

This time, within a few months of the unraveling of Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac, a dozen credible songs have taken up the collapse of the economy or its consequences, and at least twenty lesser efforts have been posted on MySpace and YouTube. "Brother" has a multiplying brood of great-grandchildren, including songs by old rock-and-roll grousers such as Neil Young ("Fork in the Road," from a new CD with the same title, and "Cough Up the Bucks" from that album), quasi-political hip-hop artists such as Young Jeezy ("The Recession," from a CD with that title), less-reactionary country singers such as John Rich ("Shuttin' Detroit Down"), and inveterately cranky indie-rock bands such as The Members ("International Financial Crisis"). Many more songs must be hatching. After all, Neil Young can dominate this terrain for only so long before we hear from Bruce Springsteen, and Young Jeezy cannot lay claim to this (or any) territory for long without an incursion from Kanye West. And where

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are Ani DiFranco and Billy Bragg when there is a topical song to be written?

Neil Young arrived early by taking short cuts, to use the kind of driving analogy, tossed-off and corny, that is common to the material on *Fork in the Road*, including the economically themed title song. The record is something of a concept album about car love, biotech, and the recession. Hastily composed and recorded with a ragtag little band in the vein of mid-1970s Crazy Horse, the album reaffirms Young's devotion to the old hippie precepts of indeliberation and zeal, simultaneously applied. Most of the songs—such as "Behind the Wheel," "Off the Road," "Hit the Road"—have interchangeable titles, chords, tunes, and words, and the general idea is to pay tribute (occasionally tempered) to those hoary symbols of American freedom and gluttony, heavy vehicles and highways, while advocating the use of biofuels.

Two of the songs deal explicitly, if simplistically, with the meltdown. In the title song, "Fork in the Road," Young sings, in his wonderfully preserved screechy whine, "There's a bailout coming but it's not for me/It's for all those creeps watching tickers on TV." He goes on:

> I'm a big rock star
> My sales have tanked
> But I still got you—thanks
> Download this
> Sounds like shit

In "Cough Up the Bucks," he sings, at full croak:

> Where did all the money go?
> Where did all the cash flow?
> Where did all the money go?

He makes a good point. The music does sound like shit, although its unabashed shittiness, its rude willingness to go wrong for good reasons—that is, in service to the whims of its creator and the moment of creation—help to give *Fork in the Road* (and much of Young's better work) its bite and its guileless veracity.

Neil Young's positions on the meltdown amount to puzzlement and bereavement. He does not question the primacy of capital in America or the glory of wealth; he wonders only why he isn't as rich as he used to be. In setting these thoughts to music, he is carrying on a tradition begun with the first songs to capture the country's reaction to the Great Depression. One of the biggest hits of 1929 turned out to be Bessie Smith's record of "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out," a song composed six years earlier by Jimmie Cox, a second-card singer and comedian in black vaudeville. As Smith sang,

> Once I lived the life of a millionaire
> Spending my money, I didn't care
> I carried my friends out for a good time
> Buying bootleg liquor, champagne
> and wine
>
> Then I began to fall so low
> I didn't have a friend and no place to go

The sentiment of "Nobody Knows You When You're Down and Out" is umbrage at betrayal—not only betrayal by the singer's good-time friends, but also betrayal by wealth itself, with its promise to keep good times and friends in ample supply. The song was one of the first major crossover hits, and it has become a standard of Tin Pan Alley–style blues, recorded over the years by every blues-loving singer from Alberta Hunter and Big Joe Williams to Eric von Schmidt and Eric Clapton. Among the songs of the Great Depression, it is immeasurably significant, probably more consequential than "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" in that it played a major role in establishing blues, music of the black experience, in parity with white music in America.

Indeed, the lasting musical legacy of the Depression is not polemical songs overtly fixed on economic matters, but songs that express in vivid, idiosyncratic, personal terms the discontent of people with little hope—and the most potent of those songs were black, sung by African Americans or by whites imitating blacks, composed by African Americans or by whites drawing heavily from black music. In the year of the crash, Charlie Patton, one of the early masters of Delta blues, made his first recordings for Paramount, and they sold fairly well; the following year, he had a national hit with "High Water Everywhere," a story-song about the Louisiana flood that suggested the economic storm of the time as well. By 1933, the number-one record of the year was Ethel Waters's recording of "Stormy Weather" (by the blackest of the white Tin Pan Alley composers, Harold Arlen, with lyrics by Ted Koehler, another white writer who had worked on Cotton Club shows), and versions of the same song by Leo Reisman (a white bandleader) and Duke Ellington were numbers eleven and twelve.

Hip-hop, which deals with lingering issues of racial, social, and economic inequity through caricature and overcompensation, infamously reveling in bravura displays of material conquest and in overweening pride in its own infamy, does not do suffering or despair very well. The Southern rapper Young Jeezy, who recorded *The Recession* last year, before Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch fell, is atypically tentative on this, his third CD. The music is simple and blunt, built around lo-fi synth effects. The title track opens with a sound collage of overlapping bits from financial news broadcasts—"No one's whispering about the 'R' word anymore"; "The government has failed. . . ." Young Jeezy enters the track in his usual persona of everynigga, rapping about gas prices and not having enough money to buy a bigger truck. In the concerns of his lyrics, he sounds unnervingly like Neil Young. Then comes the chorus, a set of declarations as simple and blunt as the music:

> It's a recession, everybody broke
> So I just came back to give everybody
> hope
> Just looking out for folk, a gift and the
> whole nine
> Nah, you don't owe me shit, and you
> keep the whole nine

Keep in mind: when read on the page, Young Jeezy's language, like a lot of rapping, appears considerably more stupid than it feels when it is taken in as it is meant to be, as one element in a soundscape of beat, flow, and attitude. Jeezy's take on the recession is elementally optimistic, even boosterish. That positivity is of a piece with Jeezy's vanity. Jeezy makes clear—here and in several other songs on all three of his albums—that he feels a paternal, somewhat demeaning sense of duty to lift his fans' spirits through the "gift" of his attention, and he acts out of a faith in the self-reliance that helped make him rich and famous. As he sings in "My President," another topical song on *The Recession*, "History, Black history, no president ever did shit for me." Young Jeezy's self-reliance is such that it has no need for Barack Obama.

Over the past several months, the hard times have prompted hip-hop radio stations to rediscover "Hard Times," a Ludacris track from his 2003 album, *Chicken-n-Beer*. It is a loosely woven patchwork song with ragged-edged sections about common struggles of many sorts—a lover departs, the money is low, friends turn away. A plaintive, melancholy song about timeless hardships, its sentiments unspoiled by self-pity, "Hard Times" is a hip-hop inheritor to Char-

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lie Patton's "High Water Everywhere," a piece of twenty-first-century blues.

Wherever one stands on the music of Young Jeezy and Ludacris, one should not confuse them with the various stunt rappers who have released songs about the economic crisis: Neal Fox, who wrote and performed "F**k the Fed," and Michael Adams, who did "I Want My Bailout Money." Both songs are parodies and employ hip-hop for its amenability to caricature; they are the musical equivalent of political cartoons, and what Ludacris is to Charlie Patton, Neal Fox and Michael Adams are to Ray Stevens and Weird Al Yankovic.

Not that there's anything wrong with a good laugh in bad times, of course. An expression of despair is scarcely the only legitimate artistic response to the experience of despair. In fact, this whole business of considering music in the context of economic upheaval grows unmanageable in scale when one considers the value of sheer entertainment as an escape from hardship. During the height of the Depression, in March 1932, Herbert Hoover called a meeting with Rudy Vallee in the White House, at which Hoover told Vallee that if he could "write a song to drive away the Depression," he would "rate a medal." Vallee demurred, instead recording "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?" While the song became one of the biggest hits of the year, it was not at the top of the list. The number-one song was Cole Porter's silky "Night and Day," in a recording by Fred Astaire, who had sung it that year in Astaire and Rogers' glimmery, vapid farce, *The Gay Divorcee*. The number-two and number-three songs were "All of Me" and "Dinah." In a real sense, every song that provides release during a depressing time is a song of that depression.

On those terms, we could think of any number of contemporary pop hits as meltdown music. The most popular tunes of our day—the Black-Eyed Peas' "Boom Boom Pow," which is number one as I write, and Lady Gaga's "Poker Face," which is number two—are dance tracks, social music of physical and emotional release, just as "Night and Day" and "All of Me" were in their time. (This is just a coincidence, and I don't mean to make too much of it, but the biggest hits of the two eras, "Boom Boom Pow" and "Night and Day" have, as the musical hooks of their title phrases, nearly identical three-note figures.) We certainly could think of songs such as "Boom Boom Pow" and "Poker Face" that way; but let's not.

Instead, let us consider a possibility we cannot yet see. If the events of the Great Depression have bearing on our time as precedent, they demonstrate how the collapse of prevailing economic, political, and social structures—the end of a kind of hegemony—cleared the way for historically disenfranchised people, African Americans and others in the underclasses, to give voice to their discontent in creative forms previously held in disrepute. The Depression brought blues to the pop charts and led to the rise of folk and country music. If new forms (musical or otherwise) emerge from the current meltdown, they might well be ones now held in such low esteem that we cannot begin to take them seriously yet. I do not know what they might be.

For informed counsel, I turned to a colleague whose taste I abhor, and he pointed me to a new genre of intolerable noise constructed either electronically, with computers, or with electrified instruments. Its purpose, he said, is to challenge prevailing standards of normalcy by "sounding as awful as possible." Its early advocates have given it a name, derived from the rock genre "shoegaze." It is called "shitgaze." I tend to doubt that it will blossom to become the dominant music of the coming years, though music critics for publications such as *The New Republic* felt the same way about blues a hundred years ago. For now, I am kind of tickled by the idea of shitgaze, as much as I am maddened by the sound of it. Maybe Neil Young is onto something. Perhaps the music appropriate to this shitty time should properly sound like shit. ◆

Jed Perl on Art

L.A. STORIES

Back when I was in college, there was a theory that the way to get a sense of how somebody felt deep inside was to ask whether they preferred Tolstoy or Dostoevsky. The friend who was drawn to the ecstatic optimism of certain moments in *War and Peace* was one kind of person, and the friend who was consumed by the darkness of *Crime and Punishment* was another. The question that ought to have been asked of museumgoers in Los Angeles in recent months, infinitely less elegant but in its own way equally revealing, was whether they preferred Bernini or Koons. You could know a lot about people if you determined whether they were more sympathetic to Bernini's muscular seventeenth-century Roman Baroque, the subject of a luminous exhibition at the Getty, or to the techno-kitsch Baroque style of Jeff Koons, whose plan for a $25 million site-specific sculpture of a railroad locomotive at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art (LACMA) seems to have survived at least the first shock waves of the economic collapse. In Koonsland, there still is money.

BERNINI AND THE BIRTH OF BAROQUE PORTRAIT SCULPTURE
J. Paul Getty Museum

HEARST THE COLLECTOR
Los Angeles County Museum of Art

DIALOGUE AMONG GIANTS: CARLETON WATKINS AND THE RISE OF PHOTOGRAPHY IN CALIFORNIA
J. Paul Getty Museum

Bernini or Koons: some will say this is preposterous, apples and oranges, especially considering that Bernini, who died more than three hundred years ago, is not around to accept commissions. The question, though, is whether anybody who has experienced the grandeur of Bernini would even consider giving a commission to Jeff Koons. Michael Govan, the director of LACMA, is said by his supporters to be a man who knows how to hold the interest of a Hollywood aristocracy that is notoriously indifferent to museums. Whatever Govan's private opinion of Koons, he may figure that his southern California audience will go for Koons's Hollywood Baroque. According to a report in *The Art Newspaper*, Govan is determined that Koons will produce his full-scale, seventy-foot-long steel-and-aluminum replica of a 1943 Baldwin steam locomotive, to be suspended from a 160-foot-tall crane outside the Los Angeles County Museum of Art. Koons does not appear to go in for elaborate justifications of his work, but a $25 million project requires some explanation, so two years ago, when the locomotive was first under discussion, he described it as "a visceral, realistic experience," one with "tremendous sexual quality." It has been said to be a civic monument—like "a town square" or "a clock tower," according to Govan—and

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it has been variously described as a salute to the Industrial Age, to Western expansion spurred by the railroads, and to California before the advent of car culture.

This would be a hell of a pop icon for the city that did so much to define pop culture. Koons, an astute salesman, has insisted that it "will not be an amusement-park spectacle," but I cannot see it as anything else. If the power brokers at LACMA believe they have found the right monument for contemporary Los Angeles, it is because they are convinced that this is a city with some sort of insoluble problem when it comes to high culture, some permanent resistance or ambivalence or hostility. I am not convinced that this is true. The assumption that pop is all Los Angeles wants began to crumble for me, or to get quickly complicated, when I visited the stupendous show "Bernini and the Birth of Baroque Portrait Sculpture" in its closing days at the Getty last fall. Crowds filled the galleries, and they were energized and attentive and altogether avid. From what I could see, L.A. was in love with Gian Lorenzo Bernini, which is a pretty sophisticated love affair. So perhaps my question—Bernini or Koons?—is not so easily answered.

So far as the museums in Los Angeles are concerned, the past year has been a pretty good time or a terrible time. It all depends on what you think matters. If you imagine, as many people do, that this cacophonous late-modern city ought to have nothing to do with pre-modern art, the L.A. story can look rather bleak. Last December brought the harrowing news of the near death of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA), an institution with distinguished buildings by Arata Isozaki and Frank Gehry and the reputation of offering an aristocratic-bohemian riposte to LACMA, which the cognoscenti are inclined to regard as simultaneously hopelessly staid and irredeemably unsteady. Say what you will, Manhattan-centrism remains the default position in the art press, and L.A. can certainly lend credence to such a perspective when the big event of the new century so far turns out to have been the opening at LACMA a year or so ago of the Broad Contemporary Art Museum (BCAM), the brain child of the art collector Eli Broad and a monument to generic contemporary art collecting in a glum big box of a building designed by Renzo Piano. (BCAM has quite a selection of shiny baubles by Koons.)

For art world rubberneckers fascinated by the fact that MOCA's endowment shrank in recent years from $50 million to $6 million, it hardly mattered that LACMA recently received the Lazarof collection, with its fine holdings in early twentieth-century art, or that the Getty has been responsible for what may well be the most important shows of Baroque art and nineteenth-century photography seen in this country in the last year. As is so often the case in corporate America, in the museum world process has all but trumped product. People who had no idea what shows MOCA had mounted or what the museum's permanent collection contained were eager to discuss the fact that Broad had come up with a $30 million donation to get the museum back on its feet (and perhaps turn it into another Broad franchise). At least that put an end to some earlier talk of merging MOCA with LACMA, a prospect that had inspired Govan to speak of a "partnership" and his unwillingness "to diminish MOCA's brand."

Branding, of course, is a big part of the problem. The people who are looking for brand identification are the same people who never quite believe that a work of art can attract an audience, if only you give it a chance. New Yorkers have just now been reminded of the artistic riches of southern California by a small show at the Frick Collection of five masterworks from the Norton Simon Museum in Pasadena, an exhibition that brought one of Zurbarán's greatest paintings to Manhattan—a painting that cannot be branded because it is sui generis, the work of a man who, as Adam Zagajewski wrote in a recent poem, "painted by turns / Spanish saints / and still lifes," so that "his still lifes / are likewise holy." The Norton Simon has always been treasured by people who care about what painters do, and to see some of the Pasadena paintings at the Frick could serve to underscore the extent to which Pasadena can offer Frick-quality pleasures.

In Los Angeles now, Govan may look like the wise and deliberate guy, at least compared to Jeremy Strick, MOCA's director, who was hustled out of his job in disgrace. But whenever I am at LACMA I have the uncomfortable feeling that Govan, like a number of the people who have been in charge of this museum, is embarrassed by the many wonderful works that the museum contains—by the little Watteau figure group, or the Picassos in the Lazarof collection, or the museum's superb Indian sculpture. If Govan had a deeper appreciation for the classics at LACMA, maybe he would be less sympathetic to Koons's harebrained scheme. If it is actually built, Koons's locomotive will set some new art world standard for conspicuous consumption. It is reported to be the most expensive commission ever proposed by an American museum.

Some might say that excess is the very nature of LACMA, where one of the early benefactors was none other than William Randolph Hearst, a man whose avidities as a collector were given a dark Baroque twist in *Citizen Kane*. One of the fascinations this winter in Los Angeles was a brilliant show at LACMA called "Hearst the Collector," in which the newspaperman's tastes were carefully anatomized. While the exhibition made no effort to present Hearst as a connoisseur of the highest order, one did see that he was a man whose taste had shadings and nuances and complexities. "Hearst the Collector" was a real California story, albeit with scenes set in Europe and on the East Coast. But then California, like any actual place, is also a state of mind. The portrait busts by Bernini, the seventeenth-century artist whose opulent Mediterranean genius dominates Rome, looked right at home in southern California. Bernini, that master of sun-struck public spaces and proto-cinematic spectacle, makes a lot of sense in Los Angeles, much as the dark Northern spirit of Jan van Eyck, Robert Campin, and Gerard David makes a lot of sense in New York.

At the Getty, even as they were presenting the work of Bernini—who might be thought of, only half whimsically, as an honorary southern Californian—they were also honoring the achievement of Carleton Watkins, the photographer whose career cannot be separated from nineteenth-century America's growing interest in the California landscape. I would rank Watkins in the company of the nineteenth-century photographers who can be said to have seen the world anew. His studies of Yosemite and the rivers and farms and coastline of California and Oregon are a commanding (though mysterious) achievement. While we know very little about Watkins's artistic ideas, we can see that the cool eye he cast over the world around him was a harbinger of modernity. Taken together, the Bernini, Watkins, and Hearst shows tell their own kind of L.A. story, a story of genuine artistic sophistication, and of the many ways that art can take root on American soil.

"Bernini and the Birth of Baroque Portrait Sculpture" was an extraordinarily intelligent and self-assured exhibition. Curator Catherine Hess—in collaboration with the scholars Andrea Bacchi and Jennifer Montagu—demonstrated a connoisseur's instincts, combining scholarly probity with a sure sense of what it is in the art of the past that can be brought alive for museum-

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goers in the present. The power of this exhibition—which was co-organized by the National Gallery of Canada in Ottawa, where it traveled over the winter—lay in the way that the marble portrait bust, with its aristocratic hauteur and slippery virtuosity, was brought to life for the democratic audience. While the exhibition contained major works by Alessandro Algardi and Giuliano Finelli, many of them miracles of sculptural subtlety and force, Bernini was very much the protagonist. I think visitors to the Getty recognized the challenges that artists faced when they set out to give human warmth to marble or bronze, which are chilly materials; and it was fascinating to see the different ways that Bernini and some of his collaborators and contemporaries rose to the challenge.

The shimmering theatricality of Bernini's work can all too easily be mistaken for superficiality. Modern sensibilities have rarely responded to Bernini as immediately as to the work of more tenebrous and disquieting seventeenth-century masters such as Caravaggio and Rembrandt. In part this is because museumgoers do not have all that many opportunities to get to know Bernini's sculptures and paintings and drawings, of which the preponderance are located in Rome. If given a chance, however, visitors to the Eternal City will almost invariably fall under Bernini's spell, discovering in the super-charged energy of the *Four Rivers Fountain* in the Piazza Navona, or the *David* in the Villa Borghese, or the *Ecstasy of St. Teresa* in Santa Maria della Vittoria, a physicality that has its own purchase on modernity.

In the Getty exhibition, which focused on only one aspect of this achievement, it was easy to see that Bernini's theatricality was fueled by deep reserves of formal intelligence, an intelligence in its own way as compelling as Rembrandt's. Portrait busts have been done with great skill since ancient times, and although it would be too much to say that nobody before Bernini had infused a marble portrait with such psychological urgency, there can be little doubt that it was with Bernini that the mask of power gave way to studies in the mentality of power. Like Velázquez and Rubens, Bernini knows how to bring us into the presence of the men (and sometimes the women) who shape the destinies of others. His realism, like theirs, is perfectly consistent with the imperatives of a predemocratic society. When Bernini renders the face of a Cardinal or a Pope, we see how psychologically fraught power can be in an aristocratic world.

Contemporary accounts of Bernini's working methods help us understand how he achieved, while working in marble, an extraordinary spontaneity. His son wrote that "Bernini does not want the subject to remain stationary, but to move and speak naturally, because … the subject does not ever resemble himself as much when he is immobile as when he is in motion." When Bernini was in France, the architect Charles Perrault observed that "he worked on the marble first, making no clay model whatsoever, as other sculptors are accustomed to doing; he limited himself to drawing two or three portraits of the kind in pastel, not, as he said, in order to copy them for his bust, but merely to refresh his mind from time to time." Others reported that Bernini did make clay models, but whether he did or not, what he was looking for was an expressive gesture. Like Leonardo before him, he was fascinated with the art of caricature, with the possibility that a personality could be defined through the abstract power of a single line or form. While Finelli or Algardi were inclined to construct a personality through an accretion of detail, Bernini took what might be called a painterly approach to marble, giving the forms a broadness, a fluidity.

Gian Lorenzo Bernini, *Portrait of Costanza Bonarelli*, 1636-38

COURTESY J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

It was in the 1630s, when Bernini was in his thirties, that he revolutionized the portrait bust. His sitters became actors in the theater of life, rhetoricians with their own unique styles, their own ways of holding their heads and opening their eyes and parting their lips. In the greatest portraits of the decade, those of Cardinal Scipione Borghese and of Bernini's mistress Costanza Bonarelli, fleeting impressions are given lasting shape. Bernini reveals a particular human temperament through a close study of the play of muscles and nerves beneath the elasticity of flesh. Matter becomes an uncanny objectification of spirit. The softness of the flesh in the portrait of Costanza, together with the simplicity of her short hair and her loose, unadorned blouse, define a pinnacle of Baroque expressiveness without betraying the underlying formality of Baroque art. It has been said that all the eroticism of rococo art is prefigured in Bernini's portrait of Costanza, and there is some truth to this—except that Bernini, for all his love of informality, also wants the inklings of eternity that are implicit in the very act of cutting a figure out of stone.

Bernini's greatest portraits catch the many-sidedness of a personality within the singularity of an image. They are definitive improvisations. Bernini is one of the supreme realists, but this is a ritualized realism—hortatory, operatic. The portrait of Cardinal Scipione Borghese, his mouth open as if he were beginning to speak, can seem self-important one moment, easy-going the next. And one of Bernini's last portraits, the bust of Pope Clement X Altieri, executed when the artist was nearly eighty, has a new kind of playfulness, almost a liquidity in the way aging flesh is handled. You feel that this man is at home in his drooping jowls, and that Bernini, even as he is saluting the Pope's power, appreciates the comic possibilities of turning the Pope's sagging face into a series of roiling arabesques.

Although the Getty is not generally associated with Bernini, "Bernini and the Birth of Baroque Portrait Sculpture" felt right in this museum where there has always been a strong interest in pre-modern sculpture, an area of collecting not always pursued with great enthusiasm in American museums. Bernini, a master of over-the-top effects, is at home in the travertine-clad halls of Richard Meier's extended exploration of over-the-top modernist opulence. While Meier's array

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of interlocking pavilions does not look any better than it did when it opened a decade ago, over the years the buildings have been so lovingly cared for that they have taken on a sort of friendly patina. As a staging ground for Bernini's smiling aristocratic aplomb, the Getty was just about perfect. The Getty has always had a bit of the air of a high modern folly, but it seems to be turning into a beloved one, too.

Folly, of course, is never far from the heart of the artistic enterprise. Even the loftiest art has about it an element of absurdity. Surely there is something of folly in the very attempt to give stone the liveliness of flesh. Perhaps it is one of the obligations of a museum to show us the difference between divine follies and lesser follies, between Bernini's splashing fountains, say, and one of the water ballets in a Busby Berkeley movie. Those distinctions are not always so easy to make, but Mary L. Levkoff, a curator at the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, reveals a sensibly fluid approach to the vexed relations between high taste and popular taste—to the whole question of where Roman Baroque ends and Hollywood Baroque begins—in "Hearst the Collector," the exhibition that she recently organized at LACMA.

William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper tycoon and famously restless collector, was revealed in this show to have been something more than the indiscriminate art addict of legend, although he probably never exactly knew where connoisseurship ended and showmanship began. Levkoff is extremely judicious about Hearst, writing that he "did not collect with the intense forethought of J. P. Morgan, Isabella Gardner, or Henry Clay Frick. He was not focused, analytical, introspective, or cerebral. He was extravagant, amusing, intuitive, and voracious." The surprise of her exhibition and its catalogue was that they revealed a real aesthetic imagination at work, a sensibility animating the showmanship. Visitors to San Simeon, Hearst's fairytale castle on the coast north of Los Angeles, have sometimes sensed true passion behind the newspaperman's incredible bombast. And anybody who went through "Hearst the Collector" saw that Hearst could not be dismissed as a man who wanted to show the world that he had the wherewithal to buy a ceiling from one castle and a choir stall from another monastery and put them together with a couple of dozen suits of armor. Levkoff has attempted to determine exactly what Hearst collected—not a simple matter, in part because the collections are now widely dispersed, a process that began in the second half of the 1930s, when the Hearst Corporation was feeling deep financial strains. Among the recent discoveries is that a sumptuously detailed bust of a woman attributed to Giuliano Finelli, now in the Getty's collection and included in the Bernini show, was once owned by Hearst.

Hearst's life is a California story. He was born in San Francisco in 1863, the only child in a family where social advancement and cultural aspirations were closely intertwined. His father made a fortune in the mining business. His mother, Phoebe Apperson Hearst, became an important philanthropist. She was involved with the early development of the University of California, becoming its first female regent; and she sponsored archeological and anthropological research and public libraries. Hearst's interest in the arts began early, spurred by the long periods he spent in Europe with his mother. Conspicuous consumption was important to the Hearsts, but collecting went hand in hand with a strenuous project of self-education. His mother pushed the young Hearst to learn German and French. Years later he explained to the managing director of his British subsidiary, who was impressed by his knowledge of art, that his mother had insisted that a "bored and impatient" boy study these things, "and gradually came knowledge, and with knowledge enjoyment, that increased over the years."

The baronial interiors to which Hearst was addicted in later years have become the stuff of legend, and there is something more than a little ludicrous, an element of parvenu taste gone mad, about the vast hall lined with tapestries and armor in his huge penthouse apartment on 86th Street and Riverside Drive in Manhattan. Yet these magnificent stage sets were created at the behest of a man whose feeling for the past was acquired in the old-fashioned way, through study and reflection. If Hearst does not have a place among the greatest collectors, it is probably because he had little sympathy for the imaginary worlds that artists create, and almost no sympathy for the art of painting, where so many of those imaginary worlds have flourished. To painting's parallel universes he preferred the immediate sensual excitement of beautiful shapes and materials, in metal, stone, wood, glass, ceramic, or textile; his collections of Renaissance armor, Greek vases, and Italian majolica are of enormous distinction.

There was honor in Hearst's love for dark wood and gleaming metal. He was always engaged by the artisanal dimension of the artistic act. He admired beautifully shaped suits of armor, the glazes on ceramics, the quality of color enameled on a mid-fourteenth-century Egyptian or Syrian piece of glass. These rare objects represented not only financial value but also ethical value: the merit of the thing well done. Among the treasures in "Hearst the Collector" was a series of Limoges enameled plates from the second half of the sixteenth century, with scenes of country life rendered in a moody chiaroscuro. Executed by Martial Courteys after designs by Étienne Delaune, they bring to the playful narratives that one knows from medieval tapestries a twilight foreboding, a Mannerist feeling for the uncanny in everyday life. This complete set of plates, now in LACMA's collection, is a unique survival.

The most impressive single work in "Hearst the Collector" was probably Canova's *Venus Italica*, carved in the early years of the nineteenth century and now at San Simeon. That great sculpture should have touched Hearst more deeply than great painting comes as no surprise. He must have loved the unabashedness of sculpture, its frank physicality. Some years before he purchased Canova's *Venus*, Hearst was offered another version of the same statue, significantly inferior, and Levkoff sees it as a sure sign of Hearst's discernment that he chose to wait until he could acquire what is the finest version of one of Canova's most persuasive essays in classical beauty. There is a mesmerizing uneasiness about the pose of Canova's *Venus*, who is coming out of her bath, clutching to her breast a drape that falls across her thigh to the ground. For Canova, the economies of classicism, with its smoothly worked surfaces and tautly simplified contours, are set in a daring tension with the frank eroticism of this beautiful woman. Canova takes us to the point where the senses are in disarray, where erotic heat and classical cool are joined in a single intensity, administering shocks to the system so strong that they cannot be told apart. The man who carried on a very public affair with Marion Davies, for whose Santa Monica beach house he bought paintings by Boucher, could certainly be trusted to understand the power of Canova's *Venus*.

Hearst's interests extended to the art of the New World as well as the Old. His mother collected American Indian textiles, and he shared her interest, building a very important collection of Navajo rugs. When it came to architecture, he again moved in directions laid out by Mrs. Hearst, who had commissioned Bernard Maybeck, one of the most orig-

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inal California architects of the turn of the twentieth century, to design a country house for her in Northern California. Julia Morgan, the architect who worked with Hearst on San Simeon and a number of other projects, had studied with Maybeck; it was Hearst's mother who had first taken an interest in Morgan, the only woman in the civil-engineering program at Berkeley. The Spanish-style architecture that Morgan designed for San Simeon was no mere replica of Renaissance or Baroque buildings, but an original invention, free in its use of older forms—a New World interpretation of Old World ideas that incorporated a great many European elements into something that had an integrity of its own, even as it echoed the Spanish Baroque that was part of the history of Mexico and, indeed, of California.

As Levkoff sees it, the Hearst interiors that were stuffed with the spoils of his European travels were also imaginative constructions in their own right—collages, or montages. Levkoff, who makes a comparison between San Simeon and King Ludwig's castles, those monuments to a madcap nineteenth-century aestheticism, says that Julia Morgan "adapted elements from a religious vernacular to a set piece in a residential estate that resembles a village of fabulous luxury in Renaissance Spain. She realized Hearst's vision. His son commented, 'He did it with something not even a fortune could buy: his imagination.' " Beyond the crazy bombast of William Randolph Hearst's collecting you may glimpse a nostalgia that has its own modern integrity. This man who embraced democratic and populist values, and played an essential role in the creation of the twentieth-century media world, must have found some sense of security in the materiality of the preindustrial world, before the assembly line had eliminated the maker's mark.

Bringing the history of the arts in California into clearer perspective is something that comes naturally to California's museums, and Levkoff's exhibition and catalogue were extraordinarily measured, refusing to deny the flamboyance that was an aspect of Hearst's taste while stepping away from the temptation to explain away his preferences as mere kitsch. Perhaps art-for-art's-sake and art-as-conspicuous-consumption cannot always be as neatly separated as some of the early moderns liked to believe. For both impulses, in their very different ways, derived from nineteenth-century ideas about the power that inheres in art. And if the moderns saw themselves as reclaiming a feeling for the fundamental beauty of materials that had been lost in the academies of the nineteenth century, the relative absence of academic training and academic standards in the American West could sometimes seem to give the creative spirits who were working there a more direct access to the central concerns of modernity—to the intrinsic force of aesthetic experience. True, Julia Morgan studied at the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris, and the great nineteenth-century photographer Carleton Watkins, the subject of a major show at the Getty that opened shortly before the Bernini show closed, exhibited his work at the Paris International Exposition of 1868.

Carleton Watkins, *Cape Horn, Columbia River, Oregon*, 1867

COURTESY J. PAUL GETTY MUSEUM

And yet much of what is interesting about their work depends on the immense distance that they traveled from Old World standards. The places where they worked and the situations in which they found themselves made the search for the new not a choice, but an inevitability.

"Dialogue Among Giants: Carleton Watkins and the Rise of Photography in California," organized by Weston Naef at the Getty, was a celebration of the natural beauty of California and what pioneering photographers were able to make of it. The dialogue of the title was between Watkins and a number of other photographers who worked in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, Eadweard J. Muybridge being the most important. Both Watkins and Muybridge made a specialty of photographing in Yosemite, with Watkins going there first, before 1860. Naef's show at the Getty was in many respects an extension of the work he began in 1975, when he was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art and the prime mover behind an exhibition called "Era of Exploration: The Rise of Landscape Photography in the American West, 1860-1885." That unforgettable show marked a turning point not only in the reputations of Watkins and Muybridge but also of Timothy O'Sullivan, Andrew Joseph Russell, and William Henry Jackson. At the Getty, where Naef built the photography department, Watkins has been an ongoing concern. Naef is currently at work on a catalogue raisonné of Watkins's mammoth plate photographs, those roughly eighteen-by-twenty-two-inch images made from glass negatives of that size which include astonishing views of Yosemite. In the quarter century and more that separated "Era of Exploration" and "Dialogue Among Giants," the history of photography has become an essential subject of study in art history departments and museums, and when it was announced recently that Naef was retiring, this astonishing Watkins show could not help but seem to mark the end of an era—what might be called the era of exploration in photographic history.

Watkins was born in 1829 in Oneonta, and was a child in the years when photography was in its infancy. Like so many of the early figures in the medium,

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he was something of an adventurer and an entrepreneur, involved in a trading enterprise in Panama in 1849, after which he spent time in South America, where it is thought that he trained with the photographer Robert Vance, probably in Lima or Valparaíso. By the 1860s Watkins was photographing extensively in Yosemite, ultimately creating nearly seven hundred images of the valley, the peaks, the waterfalls, the streams, and the meadows. The physical demands of such work were daunting. Nearly a ton of equipment had to be brought into Yosemite. "Sometimes," Naef explains, "the equipment was carried by hand up and down steep terrain to record such places as Upper Yosemite Fall." Wherever the photographer went, chemicals had to be mixed so that the large glass plates could be developed, often under the most difficult conditions.

In later years Watkins photographed all up and down the Pacific Coast, his subjects embracing not only natural wonders but railroads, farms, and mining and logging sites. The photographs also had to be marketed, and Watkins did not prove to be much of a businessman. He lost control of his elaborate Yosemite Art Gallery, opened in San Francisco in 1872, during the economic troubles of that decade. With his negatives now belonging to a competitor, he returned to Yosemite to recreate his original images, but his luck was never good for very long. The San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 wiped out his negatives and his files of prints.

We know a great deal about some of the nineteenth-century photographers. Muybridge is as vivid as a character in a novel, famous not only for his work in Yosemite but also for his ambitious collaborations with Leland Stanford on the mysteries of animal locomotion, and for the sexual passions that led him to murder his wife's lover, a scandal that precipitated a famous trial and his acquittal. Watkins, a very different case, has remained in many respects as elusive as one of the Sienese masters of the Renaissance. At the Getty, where Watkins's photographs were presented in all their sumptuous abundance, an artistic personality did emerge, but with nothing of Muybridge's swashbuckling boldness. I think there may be a useful analogy between Watkins's achievement in nineteenth-century California and Atget's achievement in early twentieth-century Paris. The poetry of Watkins's work—this is true of Atget as well—is so closely bound up with the documentary instinct that it can be difficult to say where the document ends and the lyric begins. The authority of their work—although we can see that it is associated with ideas about composition and structure that are surely derived from the older pictorial arts—seems to emerge not so much out of the high art traditions as from the photographer's attention to the circumstances of time and place, a taste that is not imposed on the situation but extracted from it. For Watkins, sublimity was to be found in reality.

The European Romantics first spoke about natural wonders as having the miraculous completeness of works of art, and this idea was eagerly embraced by American painters in the generation before Watkins came of age. Yosemite, a discovery of the mid-century years, turned out to be America's most astonishing demonstration of this naturalistic spectacle, with peaks and valleys and cliffs and waterfalls arrayed as if by the hand and the eye of some superhuman artistic spirit. Yosemite was almost impossibly grand, and the beauty of Watkins's work there has everything to do with the serene vision that he brings to his studies of nature's outrageous opulence. Although it is too easy to make general comparisons between the work of Watkins and Muybridge, I think Naef, as long ago as the catalogue of "Era of Exploration," was right to see in Muybridge the more romantic spirit, with his emphasis on "Rembrandtesque" contrasts of light and dark, and the cloud-swept skies, printed from separate negatives, which he began to employ in the late 1860s. Watkins's work at Yosemite is a little cooler, aiming for a sense of integration, wholeness, balance. Although they were working at roughly the same time, Watkins's photographs are touched with what I can only describe as a quality of earliness, a plainspokenness that suggests the photographer's lack of preconceptions. Watkins is less inclined than Muybridge to dramatize a scene by developing a pitched battle between foreground and background, between light and dark.

Naef is interested in Watkins's particular qualities of attentiveness, not only in the work he did in Yosemite but also later, in less immediately dramatic settings. In the "Era of Exploration" catalogue, he pointed to Watkins's affinity for studies of solitary trees, and found there "early examples of the pursuit of pure form." At the Getty, Naef labeled one gallery "Form and Emotion in Nature," urging museumgoers to observe Watkins's genius for revealing the emotions that are submerged in the very shape of things. Although Naef is not much inclined to speculate about Watkins's art, he does want to underscore the photographer's magnificent clear-headedness. Watkins knows how to anatomize his subjects, discovering an underlying structure, an order almost crystalline in its elegance, whether in a study of a stretch of train track in Oregon, or a glimpse of a farm in southern California, or a panorama of wood houses crowding the San Francisco hills.

I have always found something particularly moving about the later work, mostly from the 1870s and early 1880s, where you feel Watkins's tirelessness, his curiosity about new things. Contemplating a rapidly changing landscape—he has a good eye for vernacular architecture and the temporary arrangements in mining or lumbering operations—he finds his particular poetic cadence in the effort to give a definite form to a world that would not for long remain the same. In Watkins's photographs, now merges with forever. At times there are premonitions of Paul Strand or Edward Weston or Walker Evans in his work, in the sense of the photographer as a truth teller, in the lyricism of a story told straight on. Some of Carleton Watkins's photographs are as bluntly and unexpectedly powerful as a poem by Emily Dickinson.

Watkins died in 1916 in the Napa State Hospital, "blind and penniless" as Naef describes him, a pioneer in the art of photography who could scarcely have hoped to keep up with the technology of his medium. There was something especially sweet about seeing his work presented so generously in California, to which he gave so much and received, at least in his lifetime, so little in return. That he would be the subject of museum exhibitions and a catalogue raisonné might have been unimaginable to him, but then art museums would have been unimaginable to most of the artists whose work is now displayed there. Certainly the phenomenon of Bernini's portrait busts attracting crowds in California would have seemed sheer fantasy to their creator, for whom America may have been little more than an allegorical figure representing the Rio de la Plata on the *Four Rivers Fountain*. As for the appearance of nineteenth-century photographs and seventeenth-century marble portrait busts in the same place at the same time, we take this as a matter of course in the modern museum, although in some sense it is as strange as the encounter of the sewing machine and the umbrella that the Surrealists loved to quote from Lautréamont.

We are all eclecticists now, and this will perhaps make us more sympathetic to

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William Randolph Hearst, who could take an interest in European armor and Navajo rugs. In the museum world, the word used to describe the institution that embraces all manner of artwork is of course not "eclectic" but "encyclopedic." There is not a museum in California that can lay claim to being truly encyclopedic, certainly not in the sense of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Los Angeles County Museum of Art, wide-ranging in its collection, lacks a more comprehensive depth, and the Getty has explicitly rejected the idea of the encyclopedic museum, choosing to focus on certain areas and to excel within them, as is the case with photography. The danger in Los Angeles has always been that its museums can be accused of looking a bit like high-end smorgasbords, their wonders and amazements as ill assorted as the variously French provincial and Italianate and Spanish style houses in L.A.'s high-end neighborhoods. The strength of Mary Levkoff's "Hearst the Collector" was in the way that she worked to make sense of the smorgasbord as a whole, to seek some controlling principle at work. I think she found it in the value that Hearst placed on artistic virtuosity—and this, in turn, is a value that deserves to have a more general import.

Virtuosity is an unfashionable value, but the shows I saw in Los Angeles gave it a fresh relevance. Visiting "Hearst the Collector" one weekday evening, I was interested to find a youngish crowd ambling through the galleries, absorbed by the magnificent workmanship on display. "Bernini and the Birth of Baroque Portrait Sculpture" was a feast of virtuosity. At the Hearst, Bernini, and Watkins exhibitions, I could see that many museumgoers were asking themselves the same big question: how was it done? And the curators wanted to offer answers to this question, some of them quite basic. At the Watkins show, you could see it slowly dawning on visitors what sheer technical know-how and aplomb were involved in creating these serenely magisterial images in portable darkrooms in the most difficult mountain terrain. The show included a beautiful camera used to take mammoth plate photographs, an object several feet wide and high, all polished wood and brass. As for the Bernini exhibition, here the curators included a gallery designed to give visitors a sense of how a marble bust is made, complete with tools, hunks of stone, and a video demonstration. (It was set right in the middle of the show—the organizers' one false move.)

Taken together, the Bernini, Hearst, and Watkins exhibitions could have been titled "Some Versions of Virtuosity." At each exhibition, museumgoers were able to see that it was through a fascination with purely artisanal matters, through the struggle to achieve virtuosity within the terms of a particular medium, that formal values emerged. And so virtuosity—the effort to do something in the best possible way—turned out to lie at the heart of the artistic process. Of course everybody has their own ideas about what constitutes virtuosity. If Jeff Koons ever succeeds in hanging that full-scale reproduction of a locomotive off of a crane outside of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art, there will be those who hail this behemoth manufactured in some workshop to the artist's specifications as an example of virtuosity triumphant. And this brings us back to where we began: Bernini or Koons? The choice is not as ridiculous as it might seem, when we consider that the Palace of Versailles, home to Bernini's bust of Louis XIV, was recently the site of an exhibition of work by none other than Koons, including his own self-portrait bust executed in white marble. Nobody ever said it was going to be easy to tell the real from the mock. But at least in Los Angeles there are curators who want to build a public that can recognize virtuosity when they see it. Will the curators succeed? Will the public rise to the challenge? This, too, is an L.A. story. ◆

Michael Lewis
THE MASTER OF MONEY

THE SNOWBALL: WARREN BUFFETT AND THE BUSINESS OF LIFE
By Alice Schroeder
(Bantam Books, 960 pp., $35)

THERE IS NOW a long shelf of books about Warren Buffett, but this is the first time he has gone to any trouble to add to it. Reportedly Buffett now regrets his decision—he has apparently put some fresh distance between himself and his official biographer. If so, it's not hard to see why. Alice Schroeder is a former Morgan Stanley research analyst, able to understand and to explain Buffett's money-making, but she declined to confine herself to the business at hand. She has sought to describe Buffett's psychological landscape as clearly as his financial one. For the reader, the results are pretty terrific—there are not a lot of 838-page narratives that leave you wanting more—but for Buffett they are no doubt upsetting.

Over his long and admirable career, the famous billionaire has been shockingly honest about who he is and what he does. Now along comes this first-time author who insists on seeing his pleasant honesty and raising it, painfully. Even worse: she's a woman! Buffett has a long and happy history of admitting attractive, intelligent women into his life, which Schroeder describes without mentioning how neatly she fits into the pattern. These women have invariably felt the need to shelter and to protect their man, and to subordinate their own needs to his—until now. Buffett should have known better: you should never completely trust a writer. Especially if she is any good.

Begin, as Schroeder does, at the beginning. Born in 1930, the son of an emotionally abusive mother and a father whom he adored but who was unable to absorb the full shock of his wife, Buffett was emotionally problematic. In Schroeder's telling, the young Warren was sneaky, socially awkward, and generally a wiseass with a cruel streak. As a man he would reserve his harshest criticism for those who lied or cheated or stole, but as a boy he shoplifted pathologically—not because he wanted a particular thing, but simply for the pleasure of stealing. At ease in Omaha, he was unhappy everywhere else, and so he suffered especially when his stockbroker father Howard was elected to the House of Representatives and he became the new kid at middle school in Washington, D.C. He was young for his class. In the most important social departments, he started out well behind his classmates and, as he puts it, "I never caught up, basically." He had terrible social anxieties and, right up until the time he married, at the age of twenty-one, a special lack of talent with girls.

In spite of all this he was deeply, ferociously competitive. Here is one of the odd things about the man whom Schroeder describes: the plain facts of his young character assemble themselves into something like a portrait of a universal loser—and yet right from the start Buffett

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himself seems to have been able to believe that the universe was wrong and he was right. What other people thought of him, and how other people measured him, did not prevent him from establishing his sense of himself as someone who might win. In his Washington, D.C. school (before he talked his parents into letting him return to Omaha) Buffett did well in only one class, typing. Here, in his own words, is how he went about it: *"I made A's every semester in typing. We all had these manual typewriters and, of course, you'd slam the carriage back to hear this 'ding.' I was by far the best in the class at typing out of twenty people in the room. When they'd have a speed test, I would just race through the first line so I could SLAM the carriage back. Everybody else would stop at that point, because they were still on the first word when they would hear my 'ding!' Then they'd panic, and they'd try to go faster, and they'd screw up. So I had a lot of fun in typing class."* (This, by the way, is how Schroeder incorporates Buffett's voice throughout her narrative—long italicized quotes woven into the body of the narrative. One measure of how lucky she is in her subject is how much interest there is in just flipping through the book from cover to cover reading only the italicized quotes. Buffett is apparently incapable of being dull.)

The young Buffett's ambition found a number of conventional if implausible outlets—bodybuilding, for instance; he devoured books with such titles as *Big Arms* and *Big Chest*—and one strange one, at least for a little kid: money-making. At a shockingly young age Buffett learned the pleasure of having more money than his friends. To accumulate it he worked paper routes, bought and managed pinball machines, and created a horse-racing tip sheet that he sold at the local track. Upon arriving in Washington he asked his father to use his congressional status to request from the Library of Congress every book it had on horse handicapping. By the time he was sixteen, Buffett had accumulated the equivalent in today's dollars of $53,000, and hardly saw the point of taking the spot he had been offered at the Wharton School. He knew what he wanted to do for a living—live in Omaha and invest in stocks—but his parents prevailed and off he went to college. He lasted three years before he returned and finished at the University of Nebraska.

One of the patterns that Schroeder teases out of Buffett's life—not just in his investments but also in his relationships—is his tendency to seek safe harbors. And yet once he has found safety, he isn't content to remain there. Instead he waits for opportunities to stage surprise attacks on the outside world. Omaha is his fort; the outside world is lucrative but dangerous, and Buffett never enters it without some cost-benefit analysis. But in 1950, after he read a book called *The Intelligent Investor* written by a pair of Columbia University professors named David Dodd and Benjamin Graham, Buffett didn't think twice. As his then-housemate says here, "it was almost like he'd found a god." When Buffett applied to the Columbia Business School, his application landed on the desk of David Dodd. Dodd brought Buffett to Columbia; Graham brought him into his investment firm.

Like Buffett, Graham was instinctively non-conformist—even more so in his exotic personal life than his professional one. ("A Mount Everest for women who liked a challenge: they met him and wanted to climb on top," is how Schroeder oddly describes it.) Buffett—whose idea of a wild night seems to have involved reading Moody's Manuals in as many positions as possible—turned a blind eye to Graham's sex life to remain focused on his financial technique. Benjamin Graham was in many ways very different from what Warren Buffett was destined to become. Graham's experience of the Great Depression had instilled him with pessimism. He eschewed judgments about the future prospects of a company or an industry, and instead looked for bargains in the here and now—companies that were trading below the value at which they might be liquidated. Graham was "looking at businesses based on what they were worth dead, not alive," as Schroeder puts it. Cigar butts, he called these.

Cigar butts obviously appealed to Buffett, but Buffett's investment career was destined to coincide with a very different period in American financial history. There never was a better time and place to make money from optimism than in the American stock market since World War II. Had Buffett confined himself to the gloomy business of plucking wet smelly cigar butts off the ground, he would never have become Warren Buffett. And Buffett was built differently than Graham. He had emerged from his childhood both a pleaser and an optimist. Dale Carnegie's *How To Win Friends And Influence People* apparently made a deep impression on him. When he looked at a company, he saw not just its asset value but also its possibilities.

Buffett's first big bet was on a then obscure insurance company called GEICO. GEICO was not, by Graham standards, a bargain: it traded at a price above the value of its assets. But Buffett dug down into the business, saw how fast the company was growing, and, as Schroeder writes, "felt confident of being able to predict what it would be worth in a few years.... A less Graham-like analysis could hardly be imagined. Graham's 1920s bubble and Depression experiences had made him suspicious of earnings projections. But Warren was betting three-quarters of his patiently acquired money on the numbers he had calculated."

In retrospect it is hard to say whether the rising market created Buffett's long-term optimism, or Buffett's optimism simply found a lucky home in a rising market. It is hard, also, to say whether Benjamin Graham changed Buffett's life or merely gave him an excuse to do what he was going to do anyway. At any rate, Graham wound up being more of an intellectual pit stop than a destination. In 1956 Buffett moved back to Omaha, started his first investment partnership, and really never looked back. By 1960 he had made money grow at such incredible rates that "his name was being passed along like a secret." A dollar invested with Buffett in 1957 was 26 dollars by 1969, and he was taking no obviously wild risks. In no year did he ever lose money.

In describing how Buffett's mind works, and why it is so well suited to his chosen career, Schroeder is particularly good. A shrewd evaluator of businesses and the people who ran them, Buffett turned himself, at a young age, into a kind of odds-calculating machine. As Schroeder puts it, "he tended to extrapolate mathematical probabilities over time to the inevitable (and often correct) conclusion that if something can go wrong it eventually will." This habit of mind informed not just his investment decisions but also much else—for instance, his obsession with nuclear proliferation. In Buffett's mind, it is not a question of if but when a nuclear bomb explodes in a big city, and the goal should be not to prevent it but to reduce the odds, and put the terrible day off for as long as possible.

To his natural gifts as a bookie Buffett coupled an incredibly keen sense of self-preservation. He seems always to have been something of a physical and emotional coward. He is actually less wary in his financial life than he is outside of it. He avoids social conflict, unless there is money on the line, and also all sorts of

ANTHONY RUSSO

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new experiences. His long-time partner Charlie Munger likes to call Buffett a "learning machine," but there are whole swaths of human activity he actively resists learning anything at all about, such as the entire high-tech industry. He confines himself to the diet of an eight-year-old, refusing to eat anything much beyond spaghetti, hamburgers, and grilled cheese sandwiches. Schroeder describes a bizarre scene in which Katherine Graham escorted Buffett to dinner at the Manhattan apartment of Sony Chairman Akio Morita. Japanese chefs served plate after plate that Buffett left completely untouched. "By the end of fifteen courses, he still had not eaten a bite," writes Schroeder. "The Moritas could not have been more polite, which added to his humiliation. He was desperate to escape back to Kay's apartment, where popcorn and peanuts and strawberry ice cream awaited him. 'It was the worst,' he says about the meal he did not eat. 'I've had others like it but it was by far the worst. I will never eat Japanese food again.'" Buffett ate what he needed to eat to remain alive—and learned what he needed to learn to invest shrewdly.

Finally, and most critically, Schroeder stresses Buffett's obsession with money, which he famously views less as a unit of exchange than a store of value. Kay Graham once asked him for a dime to make a phone call and Buffett, finding only a quarter in his pocket, went off to make change. In telling the tale of Buffett's rise, Schroeder returns over and over to his pathological stinginess. As rich as Buffett became, he never stopped measuring himself by how much money he had. He tells Schroeder that he pretty much measures his whole life by Berkshire Hathaway's book value, and the reader can't help wondering if that is ultimately how he measures other people, too. "He was preoccupied with money," Schroeder remarks. "He wanted to amass a lot of it, and saw it as a competitive game. If asked to give up some of his money, Warren responded like a dog fiercely guarding its bone, or even as though he had been attacked. His struggle to let go of the smallest amounts of money was so apparent that it was as if the money possessed him, rather than the other way around."

Buffett's single-minded pursuit of money seems to have left him with little interest in anything else. His detachment from his children became a running joke in the Buffett family. Schroeder quotes a friend's description of the first Mrs. Warren Buffett as "sort of a single mother.... He was so used to her attention and remained so undomesticated that once, when she was nauseous and asked him to bring her a basin, he came back with a colander. She pointed out that it had holes; he rattled around the kitchen and returned triumphantly bearing the colander on a cookie sheet. After that she knew he was hopeless." In the late 1970s Susie Buffett moved to San Francisco and pursued other relationships, and even told one lover that she would seek a divorce. In the bargain she persuaded her housekeeper back in Omaha, an attractive younger woman named Astrid Menks, more or less to replace her as Buffett's caretaker. Buffett apparently leapt rather more enthusiastically into this arrangement than his wife expected. "Susie herself was shocked," writes Schroeder. "This wasn't what she had in mind when she stressed to her husband that they *both* had needs. But it might have been predicted. Warren had searched his whole life for the perfect Daisy Mae, and whatever he wanted Astrid did: buy the Pepsi, do the laundry, take care of the house, give him head rubs, cook the meals, answer the telephone, and provide all the companionship he needed."

Through it all, Buffett maintained his desire to present to the outside world a life simple and ordinary. He only ever made one public statement on his polygamous family arrangements ("[I]f you knew the people involved, you'd see that it suited all of us quite well"), though he added to Schroeder that "they both need to give, and I'm a great receiver, so it works for them." His life was structured to maximize the time and energy he could devote to Berkshire Hathaway, and he seems to have spent very little time questioning that structure. From time to time he seems to have backed away from his life with what sound like tiny spasms of self-doubt. As early as 1970, he wrote to his shareholders that "I don't want to be totally occupied with outpacing a market rabbit all my life." But always he takes a deep breath and waits for the feeling to pass.

In her account of Buffett's equally complicated financial life, Schroeder describes two decisions that led him down the path he eventually took. The first came in 1958, after he bought a small windmill-maker in Beatrice, Nebraska called Dempster Mill Manufacturing. Having milked its assets for all they were worth and then put it up for sale, Buffett found himself cast in the town papers as the rapacious, heartless big-city financier. He hated the role. He was painfully thin-skinned and avoided any situation in which he might come

The Human Condition

Hard not to wake at least somewhat cheerful
when you can listen to Angela Hewitt playing Couperin
in the morning and the dogwood's blooming
and you have a lover—not a perfect one,
mind you, but it's hardly a world meant
for perfection anyway—and, yes, back pain
of course, high cholesterol, very little socked away
for retirement, but so what? Aphrodisia will
always find its little nooks and crannies, flesh
grows timid and begins to sag with gravity's
insistence, and there are creams, now, for
everything and, for the truly vain, surgery.
For others, like the beautiful actress killed
just this week in a freak skiing accident, there's
simply a haphazard life expectancy, not something
we will know about definitively until it happens,
and then, wherever it finds us, must celebrate
as well. From the missionary position, all
may be sweetness and light for awhile, but
then, all such nonsense aside, the conviviality
of the everyday eventually triumphs, no matter
what happens to AIG and Lehman. Birds
are all asong in the fir outside, a mass of
foreclosures puckers forth from all sides.
Brethren of the mid-range, be with me tonight—
dreams will come again, the good and the bad
of them, and the short sale of the afterlife
will surely garner less than the balance owed,
but leave us free and clear to progress with
the future. Grief, whenever it touches us,
should do so lightly, as should joy. Look
out the window: trees and sky, birdsong and
the wild graffiti of the everyday, just this life
and the next one—all out there for the asking,
much like the garbage, waiting to be taken away.

MICHAEL BLUMENTHAL

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in for personal criticism. From that moment on, he sought to be seen as the good guy. He set out to solve an original and seemingly insoluble problem: how to become the world's richest man and also be universally admired and loved. At times he would still behave like an old-fashioned capitalist pig—exploiting weakness in others, obsessing about money, stiffing workers, driving ruthlessly hard bargains, and so on; but he did it so deftly and sensibly, and with such good humor, that he was seldom again cast in the role of the villain.

Buffett's second great decision was to maximize, at great financial cost to himself, the interest that the public might take in his business affairs. In 1986, Congress passed a tax reform that changed how Berkshire Hathaway's capital gains were taxed. Previously, those gains had been taxed only once, when a shareholder sold his shares. Now, so long as Berkshire remained a public corporation, Buffett would need also to pay tax on any gains from the sale of stocks inside his portfolio. There was an obvious solution, and it was seized upon by public fund managers everywhere in Buffett's position: shutter the corporation and become a private equity fund. At the time Berkshire had $1.2 billion of unrealized capital gains. Buffett might have doled these out, and then restarted as a partnership free of corporate double tax. Instead, at a cost to himself that Schroeder puts at $185 million, he kept Berkshire intact.

A man who cares so deeply about money reveals himself most wholly in his decisions to part with it. Buffett had exchanged cash for an audience. The first twenty years of his investing life had been spent more or less in obscurity. (In 1981 only twenty-two people attended the Berkshire Hathaway conference.) By 1986, however, Buffett's every move was being watched, and usually cheered. His fame became not only a pleasure but an asset. His capital became unlike anyone else's, because it came with his name attached to it. Warren Buffett saw deals that no one else saw, and had access that no one else had. If the stock market was a roulette table, he had his hand on the wheel. Then he pushed his luck.

From very early on in his investment career, Buffett had qualms about Wall Street. He began his career as a stockbroker, but when he learned that a stockbroker made his money not by enriching his customers, but by churning their portfolios, he lost interest in the job. As his wealth grew and amplified his opinions, he voiced them more frequently, and conveyed his distaste for Wall Street brokerage firms. And so it came as a shock, in 1986, when he turned on a dime and bought a giant stake in Salomon Brothers (where, at the time, I happened to work). The firm had been mismanaged and was the target of a hostile raid which, if successful, would almost certainly have cost the CEO, John Gutfreund, his job. In rode Buffett to take a stake in the firm that foiled the raid, and to keep Gutfreund in his job.

But it was no ordinary stake. Buffett's reputation as the soul of integrity enabled him to charge the embattled CEO extra for his capital: his dollars were not just money, they were also an ethical imprimatur. Salomon Brothers sold Buffett a security that guaranteed a high return, no matter how the other shareholders fared, and a sensational return if the firm's stock price happened to rise. Other investors had to worry that the firm was well run, whereas Buffett was being paid a big sum to bet only that it would not go bankrupt. He had rented not just his capital but also his reputation. The moral algebra of the transaction was curious: it caused a lot of people to feel better about Salomon Brothers but no one to think worse of Buffett.

But the joke was on Buffett. A few years later, a rogue trader at Salomon Brothers rigged the U.S. Treasury bond market. Gutfreund had learned of the fraud and failed to mention it on visits to both the Treasury and the Fed. Treasury Secretary Nicholas Brady was so outraged that he decided to eliminate the firm from the list of dealers allowed to do business with the U.S. Treasury—a decision that would have driven Salomon Brothers, overnight, into bankruptcy. The head of the SEC, Richard Breeden, described Salomon Brothers as "rotten to the core." Schroeder devotes a great deal of space to the scandal, and in the bargain delivers the definitive account of it, at least from Buffett's point of view. This entanglement with a big Wall Street firm, she tells us, quickly turned into the single most miserable experience in Buffett's career. This man who prized his moral high ground above everything was put in the position of publicly defending, and rescuing for profit, a business of which he strongly disapproved. "How had he gotten himself into the—at best awkward—position of sitting on the board of such a company?" Schroeder asks, quite reasonably. "It was as if, during a dry spell, Buffett's urge to make money had once again overwhelmed his high hopes, high aspirations, and high principles. And as had been true throughout his life, whenever his avarice got the upper hand, trouble followed."

The story that followed remains incredible. The whole world wanted to put Salomon Brothers out of business, but Buffett, all by himself, prevented it from happening. Just as some years earlier the SEC had failed to sanction him for fraud, essentially on the grounds that he was too good a person ever to have meant to commit fraud, the Treasury decided not to put his investment bank out of business because he, Warren Buffett, was willing to run it—which he did, until he got his money back. He then returned to Omaha, and vowed never to do it again.

Which brings us, oddly, to our present financial crisis. There has never really been a bad time in the last fifty years to be Warren Buffett, but just now would seem to be less favorable than most. If Buffett still measures his life by the book value per share of Berkshire Hathaway, then for the first time in forty years he must feel like a wasting asset. His share price is still off more than 40 percent from its highs, underperforming even the S&P 500. He railed against derivatives as weapons of mass destruction, and now turns out to have been sitting on a $68 billion pile of credit default swaps and exotic put options on various stock market indexes. And having vowed never again to become entangled in a big Wall Street investment bank, he has gone and sunk $10 billion into Goldman Sachs, a virtual re-enactment of his investment in Salomon Brothers—cash for reputation. The difference this time is that he has gotten himself a sweeter deal than not merely ordinary shareholders, but also the U.S. Treasury.

On the surface at least, he seems like a guy who has spent the last few years ignoring all of his own best advice. What does Schroeder make of this? By September of last year, when Berkshire's share price began to collapse, *The Snowball* was already in bookstores. Its final chapter has a rushed, panicky feel to it, as if the author sensed that she was going to watch some meaningful part of her story unfold after she told it. If so, she was right: Buffett's role in the current crisis is likely to be as interesting as any episode of his career.

Still, while Schroeder could not have foreseen the sensational reversal in Berkshire's fortunes, she offers, inadvertently, an explanation for it: the impulse to grasp for things before they all slip away. Susie Buffett, diagnosed with cancer the year before, died in 2004. "Before 2003,"

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writes Schroeder, "Buffett's need for attention had been satisfied by a few interviews a year and the shareholder meeting. He had always been careful and strategic in his cooperation with the media (if not always forthcoming about just how cooperative he had been) But starting around the time of Susie's illness, for whatever reason, he had begun to need the mirror of media attention, television cameras especially, almost like a drug. The intervals he could tolerate without publicity were growing shorter. He cooperated with documentaries, spent hours talking to Charlie Rose, and became such a regular on CNBC that it started to prompt puzzled queries from his friends."

Thus she leaves open the possibility that Buffett might have gone a bit soft in old age. "Basically, when you get to my age," she quotes him telling a group of business school students, "you'll really measure your success in life by how many of the people you want to have love you actually do love you. I know people who have a lot of money, and they get testimonial dinners and they get hospital wings named after them. But the truth is that nobody in the world loves them." Where there was once only the time value of money, there is now also the time value of love. My God, he's even given his fortune away!

In short, there has never been a better time to bet against Warren Buffett. The reader will forgive me, I hope, if I decline to do it. For one, he is sitting on a huge pile of increasingly precious capital, and has the power to extract the most onerous terms for its use. Yes, he railed incessantly against derivatives and yes, he has gotten himself twisted into the awkward position of having traded them himself. But the problem, as he most surely knew, was never derivatives. (This was a man who, in 1998, stood ready to buy the entire trillion-dollar derivatives book of the collapsed hedge fund Long Term Capital Management.) The problem was stupidly priced derivatives.

For some years now Buffett has been making his living selling insurance mainly against natural rather than financial catastrophe. He demanded high prices to accept the risk that Florida would be wiped out in a hurricane instead of low prices to accept the risk that American house prices would fail to appreciate forever. That he drifted, when the price beckoned him to drift, into selling insurance against financial catastrophe is not all that surprising. What is surprising is what he somehow avoided: every other AAA-rated financial institution essentially rented out its credit rating to the great subprime mortgage boom, and bankrupted itself. These firms have either collapsed (AIG, AMBAC, MBIA) or are in the process of collapsing (GE). Berkshire Hathaway may no longer be AAA-rated, but it will easily survive even this debacle. The problem in this sorry episode was not that we suffered from too much of Warren Buffett's instincts, but that we suffered from too little.

There is another reason I wouldn't like to bet against Warren Buffett: I did it once and lived to regret it. Long ago, after Buffett became entangled with Salomon Brothers, I wrote a long critical article about him for this magazine, which, perhaps because there has never been much criticism of Warren Buffett, makes a cameo appearance in several books about him, including this one. The piece dwelled on Buffett's small hypocrisies—posing as a friend of the ordinary shareholder while accepting bribes from corrupt corporate regimes, using his track record as a weapon against the efficient-markets people when he cut deals available to no other investor—and downplayed his virtues.

Even then I thought that his virtues far outweighed his vices, and felt a bit like the guy who, having grown weary of hearing others drone on about the physical perfection of some supermodel, went to the beach with a camera and snapped a photo of her cellulite. Now Schroeder's brave book offers a close-up of the same cellulite, but more fairly, in the context of a genuinely delightful character. Buffett might not like it, but this book has done him a very Buffett-like service. Twenty years from now, when the financial markets have forgotten our current trauma, and finance is once again fashionable, some young person will pick it up and discover that history's most legendary investor was not a cartoon but a real live human being. And still, somehow, deeply admirable. ◆

Christopher Benfey
THE WAY OF DISTORTION

FLANNERY:
A LIFE OF FLANNERY O'CONNOR
By Brad Gooch
(Little, Brown, 416 pp., $30)

"I am one of those people who could die for his religion sooner than take a bath for it," Flannery O'Connor wrote during the spring of 1958, after her rich Savannah cousin Katie Semmes had paid for a pilgrimage to the healing waters of Lourdes for O'Connor, who was suffering from lupus, and for her mother, Regina. O'Connor managed to pare down the original itinerary, eliminating Dublin ("I bet that'll be real sickening") and "Baloney Castle" (as she insisted on calling Blarney Castle in Killarney) from the original tour package. Not wishing to disappoint her ninety-year-old Cousin Semmes, O'Connor lined up early for the sunken marble pools at the famous grotto, put aside her crutches, and reluctantly submitted herself to the "medieval hygiene," later writing to Elizabeth Bishop that "the supernatural is a fact" at Lourdes, "but it displaces nothing natural; except maybe those germs."

Safely home at her mother's farm of Andalusia, near Milledgeville, Georgia, O'Connor sighed, "My capacity for staying home is now 100 percent." She had a routine physical examination to learn what further damage the lupus had done. "Quite startling to her," as Brad Gooch writes in his brisk biography of O'Connor, was the news from her doctor of "an X ray showing that her hip had unexpectedly begun to calcify. She was now free to walk about her room without crutches." Perhaps she shared the skepticism of Zola, whose novel *Lourdes* she was given on the trip, and who famously quipped that he saw a lot of abandoned crutches on the road from Lourdes but no artificial legs. Or perhaps she disliked the vulgarity of miracles on demand. In any case, it was not physical health that O'Connor was after, at Lourdes or anywhere else. "I prayed there for the novel I was working on, not for my bones, which I care about less," she wrote.

Flannery O'Connor died in 1964, at the age of thirty-nine, of complications from the savage, literally self-consuming disease that is named for its accompanying rash, which was thought to resemble the tooth-marks of a wolf. O'Connor published two odd and meandering short novels, and wrote dazzling letters and a

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few subtle and self-explaining essays, many of which were given as talks late in her life. But none of these bodies of writing alone would ensure her reputation: it rests on the solid foundation of her remarkable short stories. Flannery O'Connor is one of the towering figures of the American short story. Perhaps only Poe, her favorite writer as a child, her idol Hawthorne, Stephen Crane, Henry James, Hemingway, and a handful of others belong in her company.

The short story is a genre in which, for mysterious reasons, Americans—along with Russian and Irish writers—have excelled. Perhaps it is because these are countries that, in their ragged and unsettled histories, have maintained oral storytelling traditions in tightly knit rural communities. It has often been pointed out that the American South, with its agrarian past and its experience of military defeat and occupation, has produced an unusually strong crop of short stories. At the same time, the writing of stories seems to be a talent, like a knack for chess or mathematics or lyric poetry, that lives and dies with youth. In the years before her death, O'Connor felt the well running dry; she wrote no new stories in 1962. "I've been writing eighteen years and I've reached the point where I can't do again what I know I can do well," she lamented, "and the larger things that I need to do now, I doubt my capacity for doing."

Mary Flannery O'Connor was born in 1925 into a prosperous Georgia family. Her mother's Cline relatives owned houses in Savannah and in Milledgeville, the old state capital in the middle of the state that Sherman occupied in his famous march to the sea, but which was best known during O'Connor's life for its mental hospital. Although the family's Catholic origins set it slightly apart in Georgia white society, it had the usual memories of Civil War officers and other *Gone With the Wind* trappings. "I sure am sick of the Civil War," O'Connor once complained. Her hilarious "A Late Encounter with the Enemy," with its sardonic account of a fake Confederate general at the "preemy" of the film, is a vigorous attempt to put an end to any lingering nostalgia for the Lost Cause. Introduced at the premiere as General Tennessee Flintrock Sash of the Confederacy, George Poker Sash "had not actually been a general in that war. He had probably been a foot soldier; he didn't remember what he had been; in fact, he didn't remember that war at all."

O'Connor grew up as the "only child living in a houseful of adults." Her father, Edward O'Connor, was a good-natured real-estate agent and American Legion spokesman with a "touch of poetic inwardness," according to Gooch, who doted on his daughter and tried to provide for his formidable wife the comfortable circumstances she was used to. He saw his finances devastated during the Depression, as the family moved from a comfortable townhouse in Savannah, next door to Cousin Semmes, to a cookie-cutter rental in a suburb of Atlanta where he thought prospects might be better. The last line of O'Connor's great story "The Artificial Nigger," about the misadventures of a country boy and his grandfather in interracial Atlanta, pretty much sums up her lasting feelings for the city: "I'm glad I've went once, but I'll never go back again!"

Flannery O'Connor, 1962

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For the first twenty years of her life, O'Connor managed to resist pretty successfully the predations of formal education. She disliked about equally the strict nuns of parochial school and the lax practitioners of "progressive" education. The Irish nuns in St. Vincent's Grammar School for Girls in Savannah, she complained, were "competent at most to wash dishes," and taught you "to measure your sins with a slide rule." The nuns were not pleased that O'Connor brought snuff to school and castor-oil sandwiches to discourage other kids from sharing her lunch. When Ed O'Connor fell ill during the mid-1930s, and Flannery was no happier in parochial schools in Atlanta, mother and daughter moved to the Cline mansion in Milledgeville, while Ed visited on weekends.

O'Connor did not find the "eclectic and experimental" Peabody School in Milledgeville, the "lab school" for the Georgia State College for Women, any more congenial. "I went to a progressive highschool where one did not read if one did not wish to," she wrote with her usual wayward spelling and attitude from Bartleby. "I did not wish to." At Peabody High School, with its "activities" rather than classes, students could, according to O'Connor, "integrate English literature with geography, biology, home economics, basketball, or fire prevention." She refused to participate in the Home Economics class, where the official "activity" was sewing. On examination day, when a finished outfit was required, Flannery arrived with her pet duckling "and a whole outfit of underwear and clothes, beautifully sewn to fit the duck."

Ed O'Connor died of lupus a month after his forty-fifth birthday in 1941. The following year, Flannery entered Georgia State College for Women, a block from her house in Milledgeville. She found a niche early on as the campus cartoonist, developing her typical characters, "a short, fat girl and her tall, thin sidekick, bouncing caustic remarks off each other," and a monogram of her initials in the shape of a chicken. When wartime WAVES in uniform—Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services—arrived on campus for military training, O'Connor found, Gooch notes, "her most

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reliable cartoon topic": "There followed two years of girls butting their umbrellas along the backs of marching Waves' legs; girls clinging to tree trunks, like cats, to escape a drilling platoon; girls sneaking to check if Waves carried gunpowder in their handbags; or using Waves for archery practice." When O'Connor received a graduate scholarship to study journalism at the University of Iowa, she thought she might be a professional cartoonist. Interestingly, Philip Guston was on the art faculty at Iowa, one of several painters of the Abstract Expressionist generation (Franz Kline was another) who began their careers as cartoonists.

When O'Connor left home to study at Iowa, she thought she was leaving the South for good. The writing workshop, now a familiar feature of any creative writing program, was invented by Paul Engle at Iowa, and O'Connor was one of the first significant writers to benefit from its rituals of group commentary and revision. Engle's friends were the poets and novelists of the New South—backward-looking, self-styled "Agrarians" such as Robert Penn Warren, Allen Tate, and Andrew Lytle. These writers shared a conviction that the Old South, in its resistance to mercantile capitalism, had certain cultural traits in common with Puritan New England; and O'Connor adopted some of their heroes, including Hawthorne (whom she read for the first time at Iowa) and Poe, as her own. A young protégé of Tate's, the poet Robert Lowell, gave a reading at Iowa and encouraged O'Connor to apply for a residency at Yaddo in Saratoga Springs. During the spring of 1943, O'Connor found herself sucked into Lowell's mania-fueled campaign to rid Yaddo of communist influence. Believing that the spread of communism posed a threat to her own emerging Catholic views, she proudly referred to this shameful episode of red-baiting as "our action" at Yaddo.

O'Connor followed Lowell and his new flame, Elizabeth Hardwick, back to New York, where she met his friend Robert Fitzgerald, who had begun his landmark translation of the *Odyssey*. It was while O'Connor was living with the Fitzgeralds in a farmhouse in Connecticut that she received the devastating news that she had the same disease that had killed her father, and she reluctantly returned to Milledgeville—"for life, as it were," as Henry James describes the fate of his resigned heroine in *Washington Square*. "By early 1953," Gooch notes with perhaps a touch of biographer's disappointment, "Flannery had settled into a schedule and rhythm that remained unvaried for the rest of her life." She found in raising peacocks and painting portraits—executed in a naïve style redolent of Frida Kahlo—some of the color that she had relinquished in coming home.

The successful storyteller, like the poet, must have an utterly distinctive angle of vision and a razor-sharp stylistic edge, unmistakable from the first line laid down. Gooch makes it clear that O'Connor arrived at her peculiar temperament early on, and with the encouragement of doting parents and discerning friends such as Lowell and the Fitzgeralds, she maintained it. Even as a child, Gooch records, she was regarded as "contrary, a prankster, determined, funny, creative, and focused." He begins his book with a wonderful prologue titled "Walking Backward":

> When Flannery O'Connor was five years old, the Pathe newsreel company dispatched a cameraman from its main offices in New York City to the backyard of the O'Connor family home in Savannah, Georgia. The event, as O'Connor wryly confessed in an essay in Holiday magazine in September 1961 … "marked me for life." Yet the purpose of the visit from "the New Yorker," as she labeled him, wasn't entirely to film her, outfitted as she was in her best double-breasted dark coat and light wool knit beret, but rather to record her buff Cochin bantam, the chicken she reputedly taught to walk backward.

Gooch notes that the buff bantam is not the only character in O'Connor's menagerie who walks backward. Hazel Motes, the disenchanted army vet who returns to the South to wreak havoc in O'Connor's first novel, *Wise Blood*, is described as "going backwards to Bethlehem"—the prototype, Gooch suggests, for "a number of memorable O'Connor creations who decide to operate their souls in reverse." His religious phrasing presumably means that characters such as the bigoted and self-righteous Mrs. Turpin in the late story "Revelation," who is attacked in a doctor's waiting room by an enraged Wellesley student, are granted some glimmer of understanding despite their reluctance to see their own failings. When the Wellesley girl whispers to Mrs. Turpin, "Go back to hell where you came from, you old wart hog," Mrs. Turpin, reasonably enough, consults the pigs in her barn. "How am I a hog and me both?" she wonders.

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But the bantam walking backward is also a trickster who has been taught a freakish and funny skill; and freaks and fun are features of any successful O'Connor story. Asked why Southern writers "have a penchant for writing about freaks," O'Connor responded that "it is because we are still able to recognize one." O'Connor's stories do not have the willful and humorless power to shock of, say, Diane Arbus's photographs of midgets and giants. O'Connor's distortions are comic rather than tragic: she has to be one of the funniest of all American writers. "I am always having it pointed out to me that life in Georgia is not at all the way I picture it," she wrote, "that escaped criminals do not roam the roads exterminating families, nor Bible salesmen prowl about looking for girls with wooden legs."

O'Connor embraced the non-realist tradition of the "grotesque," as she found it in Hawthorne and in contemporary Southern writers such as Faulkner and Welty. The approach of such writers will "obviously be the way of distortion," she observed. "It's not necessary to point out that the look of this fiction is going to be wild, that it is almost of necessity going to be violent and comic." Distortion is so fundamental to O'Connor's fiction that it is tempting to see, in her early commitment to cartooning, some first crystallization of her mature vision. Her much-admired similes often have a clear link to cartoons, as in this passage from *Wise Blood*:

> He went past long blocks of gray houses and then blocks of better, yellow houses. It began to drizzle rain and he turned on the windshield wipers; they made a great clatter like two idiots clapping in church. He went past blocks of white houses, each sitting with an ugly dog face on a square of grass.

The afterimage of dogs and clapping idiots stays with us even as the car in the rain fades from memory.

Largely missing from Gooch's account—because largely missing from O'Connor's life—are the usual biographical matters of love affairs, jobs, travels, and so on. "There won't be any biographies of me," O'Connor wrote, "because, for only one reason, lives spent between the house and the chicken yard do not make exciting copy." What passed for "dating" in O'Connor's life tends to follow the same depressing pattern: an intense emotional attachment to a sensitive young man accompanied by unsatisfactory physical contact followed by rupture and a sense of betrayal on O'Connor's part. It is not pleasant to read accounts of what it was like to try to kiss the oddly passive Flannery O'Connor—"a feeling of kissing a skeleton," according to one suitor, who quickly married someone else.

Sex scenes in O'Connor's fiction, as critics love to point out, are perfunctory and vague, as in Hazel Motes's loss of virginity in *Wise Blood*:

> Since the night before was the first time he had slept with any woman, he had not been very successful with Mrs. Watts. When he finished, he was like something washed ashore on her, and she had made obscene comments about him, which he remembered off and on during the day.

"She would put a man in bed with a woman," her Iowa teacher Andrew Lytle reported, "and I would say, 'Now, Flannery, it's not done quite that way.'" After reading *Wise Blood*, a Milledgeville doctor remarked, "She don't know a damn thing about a whore house." But these criticisms are somewhat off the mark: for O'Connor, sex was another comic arena, not an occasion for worked-up "realistic" detail.

More interesting were her ties to women, several of whom were passionately in love with her, including someone referred to as "A" in her published letters and, after her suicide in 1998, revealed as Betty Hester, a writer from Atlanta with religious interests. Hester confessed to O'Connor that she had been kicked out of the Army for having inappropriate relations with women. O'Connor placidly replied that lesbian sex was no worse than any other sin; and she apparently rebuffed Hester's overtures to push their relationship beyond an intimate friendship.

Gooch's respect for O'Connor's religious commitment leads him to a rare misstep in his discussion of Betty Hester. O'Connor had sent Hester an article about Simone Weil, the Jewish-born French philosopher who was drawn to Roman Catholicism but refused to be baptized into the Church because, among other perceived failings, of its embrace of the Hebrew Bible. (Weil thought the spirit of the New Testament at its purest, as in the Fourth Gospel, was Greek.) Weil's spiritual hesitations, as described in the article, reminded O'Connor of Hester's, and she wrote of her fantasy of writing a novel based on the "comical life" of Simone Weil.

According to Gooch, O'Connor sent Weil's books to Hester and encouraged her to read them, but it is clear from the exchange of letters in *The Habit of Being*, edited by Sally Fitzgerald, that it was Hester who first read Weil and sent her books to O'Connor, who, while "very much obliged" to Hester for sending the books, found that "much of what she writes, naturally, is ridiculous to me." If she had actually read Weil carefully, O'Connor would have found a far more compelling account of affliction than what she admired in the vaporous, pseudo-evolutionary speculations of the French philosopher-scientist-mystic Teilhard de Chardin.

Like others before him, Gooch overestimates O'Connor's theological sophistication. It may be that the "cycle of hours and days had a religious significance for Flannery," as Gooch claims, amid the monotony of Milledgeville. But his hush-hush tone makes it sound as though she were a nun at her passionate devotions: "Immediately on waking, she read the prayers for Prime, prescribed for six in the morning, from her 1949 edition of *A Short Breviary*." Gooch can be unintentionally funny in charting her supposed spiritual development: "She began to look beyond the apologetic Thomism of her formative years, while noting the absence of an indwelling Christ in Buber's God as Other."

The truth is that O'Connor liked the Catholic Church because she didn't have to think about it. Just as she once claimed that she wanted to remain twelve forever, with none of the complications of puberty, she thought the Church was most trustworthy around the thirteenth century. When someone said at a Manhattan dinner party that the communal wafer was a powerful symbol, she said: "Well, if it's a symbol, to hell with it." She knew that postwar Protestant thinkers such as Karl Barth and Paul Tillich were more impressive than anything that contemporary Catholics could offer, but she clung to Romano Guardini and Teilhard like flimsy floats in a strong current.

Attempts to find this or that Christian idea embodied in her stories are doomed to failure, or to tedium at best. Who wants to believe that the interpretive key to her stories lies in the earnest theological musings of Jacques Maritain or Thomas Merton? She wanted to escape what she called in her essays "determinism," the notion that "the ills and mysteries of life will eventually fall before the scientific advances of man." She was all for mystery and freedom, which she thought the Church—at least the thirteenth-

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century Church—made room for, but she found them in Hawthorne and Faulkner as well.

O'Connor's most powerful characters are honest non-believers like Hazel Motes in *Wise Blood*, with his "church of truth without Jesus Christ Crucified," and the murderous Misfit, in her story "A Good Man Is Hard to Find," who breaks out of prison and terrorizes a family on vacation. O'Connor relishes these figures for their lack of hypocrisy, and for the linguistic richness that ensues from their liberation from respectability. (It was Weil's refusal to embrace Catholicism that made her seem to O'Connor a plausible character for a novel.) Kafka said there is hope, but not for us. "I don't say he wasn't crucified," Hazel says, "I say it wasn't for you."

Like something straight out of Dostoevsky, the Misfit's cascading rants are so interesting that we are sorry when they come to an end:

> "Jesus was the only One that ever raised the dead," The Misfit continued, "and He shouldn't have done it. He thown everything off balance. If He did what He said, then it's nothing for you to do but thow away everything and follow Him, and if He didn't, then it's nothing for you to do but enjoy the few minutes you got left the best way you can—by killing somebody or burning down his house or doing some other meanness to him. No pleasure but meanness," he said. . . .

He shoots the annoying grandmother three times through the chest. "She would of been a good woman," he says deadpan, "if it had been somebody there to shoot her every minute of her life."

O'Connor's stories seem to come from the same rich trove of nasty invention as traveling-salesman jokes, chickens and all. "Good Country People" is a joke of this kind, with a Bible-salesman seducing a Heidegger-reading girl with a wooden leg. Gooch is sorrowful that O'Connor liked racist jokes—he calls them "racial"—but some of her best stories are versions of these, as when the white Mr. Head and his grandson gaze at a dark-skinned lawn-jockey, "as if they were faced with some great mystery, some monument to another's victory that brought them together in their common defeat," in an upscale white neighborhood in Atlanta. Mr. Head is surprised to hear himself say, by way of explanation, "They ain't got enough real ones here. They got to have an artificial one."

As often as not, in O'Connor, the joke is on the respectable white people anyway, as in Mrs. Turpin's great pigsty vision in "Revelation," that the people who "had always been for good order and common sense and respectable behavior" would enter Heaven last, after "whole companies of white-trash, clean for the first time in their lives, and bands of black niggers in white robes, and battalions of freaks and lunatics shouting and clapping and leaping like frogs."

Flannery O'Connor's most astute friends knew that her writing would last not because it was intentionally Catholic or unintentionally lesbian, New South or Old, experimental or thirteenth-century, but because she wrote so well, so distinctively, so unmistakably. She admired Hawthorne for his ability to steer a story "in the direction of poetry." Elizabeth Bishop rightly admired O'Connor for the same thing, the way she could "cram a whole poem-idea into a sentence." Randall Jarrell had his aspiring student-poets study these gorgeous sentences, reminiscent of Van Gogh in their confident animism amid ordinary things, from the first paragraph of "The Artificial Nigger":

> The straight chair against the wall looked stiff and attentive as if it were awaiting an order and Mr. Head's trousers, hanging to the back of it, had an almost noble air, like the garment some great man had just flung to his servant; but the face on the moon was a grave one. It gazed across the room and out the window where it floated over the horse stall and appeared to contemplate itself with the look of a young man who sees his old age before him.

Bishop confessed that she was "green with envy" reading such things. "The writing is so damned good compared to almost anything else one reads: economical, clear, horrifying, *real*." ◆

Alan Taylor
THE MIRACLE AT BETHEL

FREEDOM'S PROPHET: BISHOP RICHARD ALLEN, THE AME CHURCH, AND THE BLACK FOUNDING FATHERS
By Richard S. Newman
(New York University Press, 359 pp., $34.95)

Few Americans know the extraordinary story of Richard Allen, who rose from slavery in colonial America to become a prosperous entrepreneur and inspirational preacher in the early republic. In this bold biography, Richard Newman rescues Allen from obscurity to achieve a larger goal: to recognize African Americans as active makers of the American republic. The book's title is provocative, since few people think of blacks as "founding fathers," but instead as passive victims in an era dominated by their owners: Jefferson, Washington, Madison, Hamilton. "Above all else," Newman explains, "this book poses a simple question: what happens if we put Richard Allen into the hallowed American founding generation?" The question turns out to have many consequences, for including blacks offers a fuller and truer picture of our origins as a nation—and of our potential as a republic.

Although sometimes repetitive and a little convoluted, Newman's book is animated by a keen sense of the central issues and by thorough research that casts new light. Newman overcomes a daunting challenge, given that Allen left us no surviving personal papers, diaries, or journals to document his private life and thoughts. In his dying year, he prepared a didactic autobiography, but it focused exclusively on public events with considerable distortion and omission. A diligent and creative scholar, Newman weaves a forceful biography from slivers of scattered evidence found in old newspapers, probate inventories, court decisions, and church records. With persistent ingenuity, Newman illuminates Allen's extraordinary struggle for a republic of true freedom.

Richard Allen began life as a slave, who owned neither a last name nor his own body. Called "Negro Richard," he was born in 1760 in either Philadelphia or Delaware on the property of his owner, an attorney and judge named Benjamin Chew. Sold with his family in 1768, Negro Richard passed

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into the possession of a common farmer named Stokely Sturgis, who raised corn, wheat, and tobacco with the help of his human chattel.

Negro Richard grew up in "a world that accepted slavery." In British America, every colony, North and South, entrenched slavery in the law, the economy, and society. Aside from some Quakers, few people questioned the slave system, so long as the slaves had the dark skins of Indians or Africans. Most of the slaves worked on farms or plantations as field hands, but the seaport cities also employed them as domestic servants, laundresses, sailors, dockworkers, laborers, and skilled artisans. Working as a field hand on a Delaware farm, Negro Richard mastered the skills of a sawyer, butcher, mason, and cartman. Although slight in stature, he was a hard worker who impressed his master.

Later in life, Allen concluded tersely that "slavery is a bitter pill." Like any slave, he had to work long, hard hours with only the most meager of compensation: a shack to sleep in, rags to wear, a modicum of food—supplemented by tending his own garden at night. At any moment a master could assert his almost unlimited power to beat, whip, and even maim his property. But for Negro Richard the worst aspect of slavery was the anxious uncertainty—his lack of power over his own life and future, both at the mercy of an owner's whim. Although better than most owners, Sturgis fell into debt and had to sell away the mother and three siblings of Negro Richard. Wounded by the rupture of his family, Richard also felt tormented by his own insecure future: "When we would think that our day's work was never done, we often thought that after our master's death we were liable to be sold to the highest bidder, as [Sturgis] was much in debt; and thus my troubles were increased, and I was often brought to weep between the porch and the altar."

At the age of seventeen, he found solace in the evangelical preaching of a Methodist itinerant, one of scores who toured the American countryside, preaching an emotional faith that appealed to the humble and poorly educated, white as well as black. Focused intensely on the afterlife, where all souls were equal, the eighteenth-century Methodists showed little respect for the inequalities of this world. In the emotional depth and utter conviction of evangelical religion, Negro Richard found, in Newman's words, a "sense of security—of belonging." Born again, he belonged first to God and only second to Stokely Sturgis.

Richard Allen later explained that evangelical conviction afforded an eternal hope that "no master can deprive you" of. That confidence alarmed most masters, who worried that slaves would expect freedom once they became Christians. In general, slave-owners tried to keep preachers away from their property, but Sturgis feared God. By working with enhanced zeal, Richard and his fellow converts lulled their master's temporal concerns. And by preaching to him the perils of damnation, they awakened a spiritual terror for his own eternal fate. Seeking release, he agreed to host Methodist preachers on his farm. One of the most stirring of those preachers, Freeborn Garretson, was a repentant former slaveholder, who rebuked Sturgis for holding souls in bondage. Shaken, Sturgis entered into a formal written agreement to sell freedom to Negro Richard. Jesus had set him free!

But freedom still had a price—$2,000—which Allen met by working himself to the bone during every spare moment, chopping wood and doing odd jobs. Remarkably, he completed his payments in just three years—two years ahead of schedule. He drove himself to raise the money before death or debt could intervene to break Sturgis's commitment. In 1783, Sturgis presented him with a deed of manumission and a letter of recommendation that Richard could employ as a pass to move through communities that were wary of traveling blacks. Richard carefully kept both documents as precious but fragile proof that he was a rarity: a free black man in a slave-holding society. He promptly gave himself a last name—Allen—chosen for reasons that he never explained.

Allen's greatest creation was his powerful sense of self-worth. As an adult, his sense of certitude and his driving ambition often rode roughly over opponents and subordinates. "Allen was stubborn in an era when many black people learned to dissemble, defer, and concede to white authority in order to survive," Newman explains. In his ultimate triumph over an enslaved childhood, Allen developed a powerful will and a commanding sense of dignity. Born a slave, he lived a free man.

While continuing to work for wages, Allen cherished the freedom to move about, seeing new places, meeting new people, and searching for his lost mother and siblings. Encouraged by white Methodists, he became an itinerant, preaching to blacks in Delaware, Maryland, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. Self-taught, he combined learning and spontaneity in a moving style that appealed to both the emotions and the reason.

In 1786, he settled in Philadelphia, a city attracting growing numbers of newly freed blacks, drawn by the opportunity to live near one another, by the city's seaport economy, and by Pennsylvania's reputation as a haven. In 1780, Pennsylvania had become the third state in the new nation (after Vermont and Massachusetts) to abolish slavery—albeit gradually, mandating the freedom of slaves born after 1780 once they reached the age of twenty-eight. The law encouraged growing numbers of slave-owners to manumit their slaves, as Sturgis had done with Allen. Although slavery persisted in Philadelphia, most of the blacks had obtained freedom—but not equality. Although the letter of the law did not discriminate against them, the magistrates and the white majority did. Enforced by violence when necessary, social custom barred blacks from voting and from holding skilled and lucrative employment. Most blacks worked at low-paying, menial jobs; the high seasonal turnover in that work rendered their lives insecure and their residence transient.

Beating the odds and the prejudice, Allen worked as a whitewasher and a shoemaker and sold dry goods. In 1789, he founded a profitable chimney-sweeping business, whose customers included George Washington, who lived in the city during his second term as president. To prove his stake in the city, Allen bought his own home and acquired rental properties. By 1800, he had become the city's second most prosperous African American—although his property ranked him only in the middle-class by white standards.

Allen worked in this life so that he could save souls for the next life, for his great love remained preaching the gospel to liberate his people from both sin and the prejudice of others. During the late 1780s, Allen uneasily preached under the auspices of the city's leading Methodist church, St. George's, where white men governed. In the wake of the American Revolution, the leading white Methodists sought greater social respectability by toning down their earlier emphasis on inter-racial cooperation and worship. Seeking higher status in a society dominated by white men, the leadership at St. George's felt uneasy as Allen brought in so many new black members. Their drive to enforce social inequality clashed with Allen's ambition to lead his own congregation.

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To do so, Allen had to overcome the qualms of blacks more fearful and deferential than he. Newman makes a persuasive case that Allen shrewdly stage-managed a confrontation that obliged most of the blacks to leave St. George's. Although Allen later claimed to have founded his own church in 1787, it remained a prayer meeting within St. George's until 1792, when the white leadership demanded that blacks sit apart at the back of the church. Worse still, the leaders had built a separate balcony for blacks to put them out of sight when whites worshiped. When the blacks clung to their usual seats amidst the whites, a scuffle erupted, which culminated in a mass walkout led by Allen. "For subsequent generations," Newman observes, "Allen's act of defiance had all the meaning and power of Rosa Parks's sit-in during the mid-twentieth century."

The departing blacks divided to create two new congregations. Allen's friend and frequent collaborator Absalom Jones formed a black Episcopal meeting which accepted oversight by that Church's white bishop. But Allen insisted on developing an autonomous black church that adhered to Methodist theology and practice. Applying his carpentry skills, Allen modified a former blacksmith's shop to form a church, which opened in July 1794. Built with his own money and hands, "Mother Bethel" was the nation's first independent black church—with Richard Allen as its minister.

At Bethel Church, Newman explains, blacks created "an autonomous space free from white control." Although Allen ultimately sought to integrate blacks as equals in every aspect of American life, he had to begin that work by constructing a separate black institution to nurture their capacity for leadership. In Bethel Church, blacks could organize political activity and could seek haven from abuses—including kidnapping by slave-catchers seeking human property for sale to the South. Unprecedented and bold, the creation of Bethel initiated one of the great cultural movements in American history: the development of the black churches that pushed for abolition and eventually spawned the modern civil rights movement. In Allen's words, Bethel served as a place where blacks could "build each other up."

In 1793, Allen faced a grim test when an epidemic of yellow fever afflicted Philadelphia, killing nearly one-tenth of the population. During that fatal summer, most healthy people with any means fled the city, leaving behind the sick and the poor—overlapping groups. The white flight tripled the city's proportion of blacks, for few of them could afford to leave. The city's preeminent physician, Dr. Benjamin Rush, turned to Allen to recruit blacks to act as nurses, pallbearers, and gravediggers. An abolitionist, Rush shared Allen's hope that this dangerous service by blacks would shatter the prejudice of whites. Instead, the dependence on black help inflamed that prejudice, manifested in bitter complaints that the nurses extorted premium wages from the sick. In fact, those blacks merely sought the same wages as whites—but critics saw equality in wages as extortion by people destined for drudgery. The primary critic, a journalist named Mathew Carey, also charged that blacks exploited the crisis to pilfer from the sick and to plunder abandoned homes.

Breaking with the tradition of black deference, Allen and Jones responded with a forceful pamphlet which insisted that, in Newman's words, "blacks as a class acted more heroically than whites." Countering Carey's vague charge of rampant black crime, they cited many specific examples of black sacrifice. A "fierce denunciation of racism," as Newman describes it, the pamphlet concluded with Allen's message to slaveholders that their sin would damn them to eternity and corrupt the republic. Allen warned them to repent by liberating their slaves: "If you love your children, if you love your country, if you love the God of Love, clear your hands from slaves, burden not your children or country with them."

In other slave societies—particularly in Louisiana and the Caribbean—freed blacks sought to get ahead by rejecting solidarity with slaves. These freedpeople sought a middling position in society, below whites but superior to slaves. In the United States, however, free blacks recognized that they could not advance by forgetting their people still in bondage. The particularly relentless racism of American society rejected gradations of status and color in favor of a stark polarity that deemed all blacks inferior to all whites. By casting all blacks as natural slaves, that polarity eroded the benefits of freedom, undermining the condition of free blacks.

Allen understood this linkage by painful experience. A professional slave-catcher had cast the minister into jail, accusing him of being a runaway. Only his public prominence saved him from being sent south for sale—the fate of many free blacks who fell into the clutches of slave traders. To secure their freedom, then, the free blacks had to liberate their brethren. Allen insisted that black freedom would be tenuous and black slavery would be perpetual if they waited on the paternalism of whites for justice. Anticipating Frederick Douglass, he offered himself as witness to the black longing for freedom: "I have myself been a slave and was as desirous of freedom as any of you." Rejecting the canard that blacks were happiest in slavery, Allen appealed to whites to understand with empathy the suffering of slaves in a land that professed to be free.

Allen also argued that, by leading exemplary lives, blacks could vindicate their race as properly free and equal in America. Foreshadowing Booker T. Washington, he insisted that hard work, steady frugality, and Christian morality could win a black prosperity that would command respect from white people. Otherwise he feared that immorality and poverty would empower "the enemies of freedom [to] plead it as a cause why we ought not to be free.'" But Allen argued that the reforms must be led by blacks rather than by paternalistic whites. By policing themselves, free blacks could demonstrate the leadership that qualified them to help govern the republic.

After weathering the yellow fever controversy, Allen focused on expanding his church, which grew from about forty charter members in 1794 to over one thousand during the 1810s. As the fastest growing Methodist congregation in the city, Bethel evoked more anxiety than pride on the part of the white preachers in that denomination. Resentful of Allen's success and his uppity style, the white elders insisted that they owned his church and should control who preached there. From 1812 through 1815, White Methodist elders repeatedly tried to force their way into the Bethel pulpit—as a show of legal possession. Just as often, Allen's supporters blocked their way and shouted down the intruders.

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Rebuffed, they brought suit and won a judgment permitting them to sell the church building and its land in June 1815. You can imagine the shock that this decision inflicted upon Allen, who regarded Bethel as more than his most cherished accomplishment—as, in fact, himself. If he lost Bethel, he returned to subjugation, which was akin in his mind to slavery. But the white Methodists underestimated Allen. He had earned enough money to offer the high bid for his own church. For $10,125—a small fortune—Allen saved Bethel Church and defied the white Methodists. But that setback invited a renewal of their efforts to invade and preach at the church—and to press a new lawsuit for control. This time the court awarded full autonomy to Allen and his trustees.

To celebrate, Allen invited other black Methodist preachers from the Middle Atlantic states to convene at Bethel Church in April 1816. The convention formed their own distinct denomination—the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church—restricted to people of African descent and with Allen as the bishop. For the first time, blacks could govern their own denomination free from the supervision of white men. During the next decade, the AME grew rapidly in numbers and in geography, spreading north, south, and west to multiply from one thousand members in 1816 to ten thousand in 1826.

To assess Allen's significance, Newman employs the notion of a "black founder" in two ways, one bolder than the other. In the more modest (but still important) sense, Allen was a Founder for African Americans, a man who pioneered black institutions and black politics. He helped to create the first black charitable society, and copyrighted the first book authored by African Americans, and organized the first major Christian denomination led by blacks. He also established a moral critique of racism and a non-violent mode of protest of the kind later developed and sustained by Frederick Douglass, Rosa Parks, and Martin Luther King Jr. As a champion of "nonviolent but confrontational reform," Newman writes, "Allen was "the forerunner of modern civil rights activists."

In a bolder sense, Allen was a Founder for all Americans. He advanced a prophetic vision of America as a multi-racial democracy of equal rights and equal opportunities. His egalitarian vision was far more daring than anything considered by the more famous white Founders. Allen exceeded them by fighting against the white racial privilege that so stunted, and threatened to stifle, the libertarian promise of the American Revolution. Newman notes, "He and other black founders still do not get enough credit … for creating a tradition of public protest that undermined notions of racial superiority."

Allen and other black activists—James Forten, Prince Hall, Absalom Jones—struggled against the constriction of the revolution into a race-based republic for white men. In 1776, the white Founders had declared all men created equal and divinely endowed with inalienable rights, but by 1790 most of them had regretted that revolutionary burst of enthusiasm. In 1790, Congress adopted a naturalization law that limited new citizenship to white male immigrants. In late 1799, Philadelphia blacks petitioned Congress, then meeting in their city, to repeal the fugitive slave law (which had pinched Allen) and to consider emancipating all of the slaves by some gradual process. But by an 84 to 1 vote, the House of Representatives rejected the appeal with contempt, asserting that free blacks lacked the standing as citizens to petition Congress. A Congressman from Georgia sneered that "'We the people' does not mean them." Most white men had hardened around the consensus that the United States was a white man's republic. Even most white abolitionists of that generation doubted that black freedom should bring equal political rights. In their view, the best that blacks could hope for was a limbo above slavery but below citizenship.

Despite this crushing defeat, black activists refused to abandon the universal freedom and equality promised by the Declaration of Independence. Allen insisted that blacks had a sacred and prophetic mission to save the republic from the racism of white Americans. Since most whites had lost faith in true freedom, black Americans, as Newman remarks, were "the people on whom the great experiment in liberty depended." By non-violent resistance, blacks had a duty to remind the majority of the inclusive dream.

In his own lifetime, Allen failed to secure the integration of blacks as citizens with equal rights. He had to settle for building black institutions and bolstering black confidence—so that they could preserve revolutionary ideals for a better future. By turning to black separatism, Allen sought to buy time for the integrated America that he preferred. But his efforts certainly inspired Frederick Douglass, the great abolitionist of mid-century, who considered Allen the author of a "new Declaration of Independence"; and pressure from Douglass helped Abraham Lincoln to make the case to white Americans that the security of their freedom required that all men be free. "What, after all," Newman asks, "was Abraham Lincoln's call for a 'new birth of freedom' during the Civil War other than a rousing resuscitation of black founders'—of Allen's—original creed?" Much of what Allen wrote sounds vaguely familiar because of the resonances we hear in the subsequent eloquence of Booker T. Washington, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Martin Luther King Jr. For the survival of their dream through the grim days of the nineteenth century, we owe Richard Allen even greater thanks than we owe Thomas Jefferson.

But even the greatest of prophets suffer from doubt in the hardest of times. While dreaming of an integrated republic, and building the refuge of a black church, Allen began to doubt America's redemption. Allen had made

She said *But It Was Only A Small Hurt*

In line at the drinking fountain desert bus stop years
of complete blackness you bring back with you, *circa*, 1968,
that took me through several states, some of which I would have to ask
kind strangers to name so I would know where I was. But
that's no big deal. No one would medicate us in those days,
so we medicated ourselves, and
back to the woman standing in line at the only drinking fountain
at the desert bus stop of veritable vultures, crying and talking
to her friend who also stood in line, and who consoled her
as friends are meant to, her arms draped over her shoulders,
saying sweet, quiet things into her ear, and then all down her neck and breasts.

BRUCE WEIGL

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himself an exemplary American—industrious, pious, benevolent, virtuous, patriotic, and prosperous—and yet every day and in every way whites treated him as their black inferior. He reaped insults in the streets and from Congress, and he went to jail as a suspected runaway, and he had to spend his fortune to rescue his own church.

Beginning in the 1790s, and accelerating after 1800, the white public and their politicians turned away from the inclusive republic of the revolution. Instead of promoting abolition, the federal government asserted the superiority of whites, protected the property interests of slave holders, and allowed the westward expansion of slavery. For Allen, a last straw came in 1814, during the war with Britain, when an enemy fleet and army approached Philadelphia. Black Philadelphians offered to help build fortifications and to fight the common foe—but the city's white fathers refused to let blacks bear arms, and would allow them only to work on the forts in segregated crews. The city fathers regarded black equality as a greater threat than a potential British attack (which, fortunately for them, never arrived).

Allen had long nurtured the double consciousness of African Americans—the inner debate between hope and despair, between forgiveness and anger. Despair and anger began to win as white supremacy became more entrenched in America. During the 1810s, he felt drawn to the African colonization championed by Paul Cuffee, a successful black ship captain and merchant from Massachusetts. To free American blacks from prejudice and to promote Christianity in Africa, Cuffee proposed to lead black colonists to Sierre Leone in west Africa. Intrigued, Allen recast the redemptive mission for African Americans: if the United States would not be saved for equality, perhaps Africa could be saved for Christ.

But Cuffee's project suffered a not-so-friendly takeover by white politicians, who wanted to push out free blacks in order to reduce their challenge to the slave system. As leadership passed from a dying Cuffee to the new American Colonization Society, led by Henry Clay and James Madison, common blacks angrily rejected colonization. Allen had to reassess his support in January 1817, when a mass meeting in Bethel Church loudly bellowed "no colonization!" He endorsed the meeting's resolution "that we never will separate ourselves voluntarily from the slave population in this country." The black masses reminded Allen that free and enslaved blacks shared a common destiny within America. Allen crafted his most famous words to renounce black colonization under white auspices: "[T]his land which we have watered with our tears and our blood, is now our mother country and we are well satisfied to stay where wisdom abounds, and the Gospel is free."

Newman reveals that Allen's retreat was only partial. Like other abolitionists, he despised the American Colonization Society, but he continued to dream of a black exodus under their own leaders. During the 1820s, Allen welcomed an invitation by the president of Haiti—a black republic—to recruit American blacks as settlers. In 1824, Allen thanked that president for offering a haven of "freedom and equality" to blacks seeking an escape from the American "land of oppression." About six thousand American blacks migrated to Haiti. Most of them returned disappointed, balking at the French language and the Catholic and Vodou religions.

And yet Allen again cast about for a haven to welcome young blacks, for he felt too old and entrenched to leave the "land of oppression." In 1830, he thought that British-ruled Upper Canada (now Ontario) offered opportunity and equality for blacks. But nothing came of that proposal before death came for Allen, in early 1831. And even when promoting exodus, Allen continued to work for the redemption of America. In 1827, he helped to organize the Free Produce Society of Pennsylvania, which promoted a boycott on goods and produce made or raised by slave labor—a pioneering use of a consumer boycott to press for social change. In his last years Allen struggled to answer the question (in Newman's words): "Was the American nation a vessel of freedom for people of color or an iron cage of oppression?" Could they save America, or should they escape from it?

By recovering Allen's complexity as "a divided soul," Newman affords him a full humanity, thereby rescuing him from the rigidity of an icon. The tyranny of hindsight demands that past people become our heroes (or our villains) by behaving with a consistency that would have been shallow or impossible in their own time. That Allen struggled for the right way attests to the hard choices that his people faced in a world which we only half-remember. The central narrative of American history insists that we began purified by leaving Europe and have been getting better ever since, perfecting our special brand of freedom. In this morality play, the American Revolution serves as an accelerator, creating a republic on a slow but inexorable course to freedom and justice for all. If this is so, then it matters little that the white Founders failed in their own time to extend freedom to most blacks or to allow equality to any of them. Instead, it is said, their republic ensured that freedom, equality, and justice would emerge in due time—and not a moment too soon.

By casting the early republic as a perfect machine of inevitable progress, this consoling version of our history is doubly distorting. First, it obscures the contradictory nature of the revolutionary generation. The revolution enhanced the liberty of common white men and allowed a measure of freedom for the black minority in the northern states—but the revolution denied citizenship to free blacks, while entrenching and expanding Southern slavery, which remained the lot of most African Americans. White supremacy became more virulent and more ratified by law after 1800 than before. During the 1820s and 1830s, most northern states rescinded the right to vote from blacks (who had rarely been allowed to exercise it previously). And thanks to the southwestern extension of slavery, there were twice as many American slaves when Allen died compared to when he was born. "Richard Allen's world was filled with high hopes and dashing disappointments," Newman concludes.

Our comforting story of inevitable progress also obscures the endurance and the creativity of real people working to change their society—or at least to preserve its ideals for a better day. In particular, the usual story reduces black people to silent victims, waiting for white people to liberate them once the time becomes right. By recovering Allen's life as a troubled but persistent redeemer of our republic, Newman illuminates a truer history of struggle by black as well as white Americans. In his scholarship, Newman reflects Allen's legacy: just as Allen sought to redeem the republic from the unbearable burden of whiteness, Newman helps to reform our national memory which insists that our Founders were all white men at the center of power. If we should finally achieve a genuinely egalitarian society, we will owe as much to our black founders as to their white brethren. ◆

ANTHONY RUSSO

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Washington Diarist

My Secret Life

I was given many reasons to deplore perfection, and never to dream of it. The tradition in which I was gratefully raised included in its beginnings an admonition against imperfect offerings, but grew into a welcoming comprehension of human finitude. It may be onerous to be reminded that I am not free to desist from the work, but it eases the night to know that it is not for me to finish it. My religion rains obligations, but it is notably free, except in some of its more stringent and sectarian versions, of the worst terrors of sin. The compassion is even in the etymology: in Hebrew, the arrow that misses its target "sins" against it. The proper response to imperfection is not despair. It is another arrow. And this penetration of duty by mercy was reproduced for me in my other universe, the America that had prostrated itself before psychology, in which the best was infamously the enemy of the good, and the individual was to aspire chiefly to adjustments. This atmosphere of acceptance was a benevolent thing. Perfectionism is also a way of thwarting, or injuring, oneself: masochism pretending to morality, in which one's demons are tricked out as one's angels. Yet the management of the psyche soon broadened into the larger managerial ethos that leveled every domain of American life, for which the problem with perfection is finally that it is impractical. One of America's dubious innovations has been to confer philosophical prestige upon practicality. When something works, we pronounce it truth. And beauty, too: at an antique shop in Maryland, I once found myself in a dispute with a brilliant companion about the beauty of tools. Stirred by the design of some nineteenth-century kitchen implements, she said that their fitness for their function made them beautiful. I said that their beauty was owed to the extent to which their form surpassed their use. She persisted in her mechanistic rapture, but proposed that there are many kinds of perfection. This, an ancient notion, appeased my exasperated idealism, but it settled nothing. The perfection of which I spoke was neither relative nor metaphorical. I could apprehend the modest perfections that she extolled, but she could not apprehend the immodest perfections that I extolled.

My training in the war against perfection was completed by my apprenticeship in post-war liberalism. I have no quarrel with the conclusion of my elders that it was a belief in perfectibility that was in part responsible for the slaughters of totalitarianism. Perfectionism, personal or historical, is an eschatology, a doctrine of revolution; and in the wake of genocide it seemed prudent to build a fence around the fire, around any ambition of such force and finality. My teachers taught me well the lessons of complexity, moderation, contingency, patience, and irony in historical action. But I began to worry that the reverence for limits was going too far; that an inhibition which belonged in one realm of existence, the political realm, was conquering all the other realms, and leaving the prospects of the spirit smaller than they needed to be. I wanted something more than muddling through and less than apocalypse. Also, the historical picture was mixed: it was in the language of absolutes, and with an impatient and unironic idea of justice, that civil rights were won in America and democracy was won in Eastern Europe. Can we really live without concepts of transcendence? Can a liberal really not enjoy a metaphysical life? Was Schelling—to borrow the title of Lukacs's somewhat ridiculous book—really responsible for Hitler? These questions I put to Daniel Bell (who has now turned ninety, as if his venerability were in need of chronological confirmation) one afternoon many years ago, as we sat with wines and theories on his back porch in Cambridge. It was from him that I learned the multiplicity of the realms, and so it was to him that I expressed my heresy about the categorical repudiation of the dream of perfection. "We knew just how much we were giving up," he pensively explained. I was moved by the catch of melancholy in his vigilant voice. It was his tribute to the fullness that preceded the horror.

If perfect offerings had not been enjoined, would any offerings have been brought? A culture imparts nothing more significant, perhaps, than its level of exertion, its ideal of strain. Whereas (this is my religion again) it is wrong to enact a decree that the community cannot fulfill, I find nothing particularly humane about aiming too low. The release should come at the finish, not at the start. The bells will crack, but I do not see that we should make them with cracks. We are indeed imperfect beings, which is why we harbor the imagination of perfection. Yet our givens cannot be our goals. Why reach for what one already is? That is a formula for complacence, or worse; and in the adoration of the conditioned in modern thought, and of identity in contemporary society, I detect a grandiose glibness, a species-wide or group-wide self-love. I desire that my offerings should find favor for reasons other than that they are mine. We wish to be preserved from the discovery of our inadequacies, but we do not deserve such protection. All are forgiven, none are pre-forgiven. Failure does not mean that one was wrong, which is the cheap unpoetical theodicy of the pragmatist. Success, for the mystic or the businessman, is intermittent; but to find yourself back at the beginning is to be granted another opportunity to break a boundary. In politics, the aftermath of perfection, which is to say, of total power, is shattering, but there is nothing cruel about the aftermath of a perfect nude or a perfect sonata, or a perfect bowl, or a perfect kindness. There are transformations that do not kill and do not die. To impose the spiritual stagnancy of politics, its containment of extreme vision, upon all of existence would be perversely to re-politicize it, which is how we got into this mess.

"By reality and perfection I understand the same thing." That may be the most shocking sentence I ever saw. I read it in Riverside Park as a student, for a tutorial in Spinoza, who was a liberal in society and a perfectionist in the cosmos. I remember recoiling from such an intuition, but also coveting it. I did not yet know this sentence, which I found recently in one of Spinoza's letters: "We cannot conceive imperfection in things except by having regard to other things possessing more reality." I covet it, too. So I am out of step. I live among good people who are indifferent to my hunger. It feels almost like a secret life. Anyway, I have nothing to add to the panic about Pakistan.

Leon Wieseltier

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